WHEN CHRIST COMES AGAIN

GEORGE·P·ECKMAN

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WHEN CHRIST COMES AGAIN

BY
GEORGE P. ECKMAN

SECOND EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

THE ABINGDON PRESS
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

BT885
.E3
1918

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MAR 25 1918

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No 1

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	Approach to the Doctrine	7
II.	True Place of the Theme	23
III.	Christ's Great Prophecy of His Second Coming	50
IV.	How and Why Is Christ Coming Again?	77
V.	When Is Christ Coming Again?	98
VI.	What Is Christ Doing Now?	118
VII.	What Shall We Do Till Christ's Return?	136
VIII.	Is the World Growing Better?	158
IX.	What About the Millennium?	204
X.	Millennial Fancies and Fallacies	236
XI.	Prophecy and the Second Advent	266
XII.	The Signs of the Times	302
	Appendix	343

CHAPTER I

APPROACH TO THE DOCTRINE

THIS is a plain book for plain people.

It was conceived in prayer and born of a desire to be helpful to the souls of men.

Many devout persons are troubled about the second coming of our Lord. They are eager to know what they ought to believe, rather than to be told what they ought not to believe.

The author of this little book has spent many years in the pastorate, and has been near to the people. He has written what he believes they need, and he asks God to bless his message to their spiritual profit.

He has no selfish purpose to serve. He does not care for reputation. His only concern is truth. He writes from a deep conviction. He feels himself goaded to his task by the Holy Spirit.

One of the greatest thinkers among men admitted that "he regarded as his best friend the man who robbed him of his dearest error and put despised truth in its place." The surest way to bestow this favor is to set the truth openly before the face of error. Jesus

said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[1] This is a principle which applies not only to the truth which saves from sin, but also to the truth which liberates the mind from falsehood.

Therefore this little book is built upon the Scriptures, and not upon the imagination of man. It also takes into account the facts of human experience, which never contradict the Scriptures, if both are accurately understood. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[2]

Men may be very brilliant, and at the same time very misleading. Every writer on religious themes should regard the warning of Saint Paul: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."[3]

Right Use of the Bible

The Bible must be used frankly, nothing being taken away from it which belongs to it, and nothing added to it which does not belong

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[1] John 8. 32.
[2] 2 Peter 1. 16.
[3] Colossians 2. 8.

to it. Teachers of the Scriptures must be able to say with Saint Paul: "We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully."[4]

The Bible is the most abused book in the world. It receives its worst treatment from certain persons who call themselves its friends. It has nothing to fear from its open enemies. "For

All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass.
The grass withereth, and the flower falleth:
But the word of the Lord abideth forever.
And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you."[5] "The word of God is not bound"[6] by those who willfully seek to hem it in. The infidel cannot harm the Bible. No science can upset it. The vain philosophy of men cannot disturb it. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."[7]

But the influence of the Bible can be injured

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[4] 2 Corinthians 4. 2.
[5] 1 Peter 1. 24, 25.
[6] 2 Timothy 2. 9.
[7] 1 Corinthians 1. 21, 25.

by those of its alleged friends who either purposely or unwittingly pervert its teachings. There are in it "some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, *as they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."[8] But the learned also fall into this grievous wrongdoing, forgetting "that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."[9] Human wisdom is not capable of making additions to inspired Scripture which are not guaranteed by express and unquestionable revelations of the Spirit; and what one might fancy to be an inspiration from God is to be tested by his known and certified disclosures. "Which things also we speak," says Paul, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual *words*."[10] Even the great apostle candidly said when he was discussing certain subjects, "I have no commandment of the Lord."[11] Surely, teachers in our day should be equally scrupulous and guarded.

The advice given long ago through Jeremiah is still good: "The prophet that hath a dream,

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[8] 2 Peter 3. 16.
[9] 2 Peter 1. 20, 21.
[10] 1 Corinthians 2. 13.
[11] 1 Corinthians 7. 25.

let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully."[12] It is a sad and mischievous thing that even good people in our day will mix up their dreams with the word of the Lord. When a man puts his theory, even if he thinks it is from God, on the same high plane with the words of Scripture, he is guilty of a serious impropriety, to say the least. His act may do great harm to simple-hearted people. Everyone who ventures to teach divine things should pray earnestly that he may be able to present himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."[13]

Many theorists write into the word of God what is not there. We cannot say that in all cases they do this knowingly or willfully, but the result is just the same. Every passage of Scripture should be examined in the most prayerful spirit, and by the aid of the best and most devout scholarship that can be obtained. With even painful self-denial, he who writes about a Scripture text should make sure that he has not put into it the least thing it does not actually say.

But even this care is not enough. He must

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[12] Jeremiah 23. 28.

[13] 2 Timothy 2. 15.

now compare the text with every other scripture which bears on the same truth. In doing this he must be certain that the passages he uses for comparison are really written on the same subject. He must not be deceived by a similarity of words. This is the peril of all who go dredging through the Bible for proof texts, and are not careful to see that the texts selected are what they seem to be on the surface. Great harm has been done to religion by forgetting this caution. If every student of the Bible would ask, "Who wrote this sentence? When did he write it? To whom did he write it?" a great amount of danger would be avoided. The Holy Spirit has spoken through a great variety of persons and under a great diversity of conditions, and for many different people. All these things, if they are remembered, and if they are given their true value, will keep us from seriously misunderstanding the Bible.

Christ Himself the Test of Doctrine

We should fill our minds with the word of the Lord. Many of the things taught to-day about the second coming of Christ have no standing in the Scriptures. Yet those who proffer these stones in the place of bread strive to make their followers believe that the texts

they quote are divinely inspired proofs of their wrong opinions. Careful Bible students are not cheated in this way, but the unwary are often thus deceived. Reader, let no man dazzle you by an array of texts into accepting his theories, on the supposition that he must be right because he names chapter and verse for his doctrine. Sift his texts for yourself. Do not take his word for their meaning. Study them in their connections. See what goes before and follows them. If you do not feel able alone to get at the exact truth, go to some Christian minister who has spent many years in patient and scholarly searching of the Scriptures and obtain his help.

Here is a test, however, which the humblest Christian can apply for himself: bring everything to the touch of the mind of Christ. He said, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me."[14] He is the real key to all prophecy and all doctrine. Every piece of writing in the Bible must be judged by the light of his character and teaching. The Spirit of Christ we may have in our own hearts, and "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."[15]

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[14] John 5. 39.

[15] Romans 8. 9.

It is by obeying God that we enter into the Christ life. "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching."[16]

Now, when a theory is brought to us with a great show of authority, let us ask whether it is a teaching which corresponds with the spirit of the Christ who speaks in the Gospels, and whom we know because we have him in our hearts. Perhaps some one will quote from Paul, or Peter, or James, or some other writer, giving an interpretation of the text which fits his own theory. Let us then ask ourselves whether this representation of what these inspired men wrote is in accord with what we know Christ said, and with what we know he is. If any man puts forward a teaching which is hostile to our Lord's recorded way of speaking on the same subject, we may be sure it is wrong. If prophecy is made to mean something contrary to the spirit of Christ as you know him by a living experience of his life, then you may be certain either that it has been misinterpreted or that it does not refer to Christ at all. Believing this to be the only safe way in which to study the Scriptures, emphasis is laid in this book, first upon Christ's own words, then upon the words of his apostles. Out of these it is possible to reach the

[16] John 7. 17.

meaning of prophecy. To begin the other way around, starting with ancient prophecies which are very obscure, moving on to apostolic writings, and finally using both to fix a doctrine before we have learned precisely what Christ taught, is to follow an uncertain lead, to say the least.

Things Which Are Hidden

If we find difficulties which we cannot explain (and the greatest minds have been compelled to admit that some things in the Bible are too deep and mysterious for them to fathom), we need not lose our confidence. It is not necessary for us to work out all the puzzles of the Scriptures. This is one of the temptations which beset earnest Bible students. They are led away by the fascination of a difficult passage. They become more interested in it than in some spiritual truth. This is the defect of some who are carried away by the strange figures in the Bible, so that they have no time or energy for real Christian service. They worry and weary themselves over the beasts in Daniel's visions or in the book of Revelation, while they neglect to do Christian work that would overcome the beasts of iniquity in our day. We do not need to explain every dark saying in the Scriptures,

but we do need to show forth Him who is the light of the world. We should not blink the difficulties in the Bible. We should frankly admit them. But we need not feel compelled to invent a theory to fit them.

Moses truly said, "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."[17] It is quite enough for us to act upon what is plainly revealed. There is no profit in stretching our minds upon the rack of questioning about things hidden from us by God's wisdom. Jesus uttered a caution which contains a widely applicable principle when he said to his disciples, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority."[18]

The only honest way with the Bible is to examine all scripture first, and build the doctrine upon a careful study. Many persons begin the other way. They concoct a doctrine, and then go through the Scriptures to find texts which will support it. The Bible is so wonderful that you can prove anything in it if you omit what you do not want for your purpose and take what you do want. That

[17] Deuteronomy 29. 29.

[18] Acts 1. 7.

is a method pursued by some who write and speak upon the question of the second coming of our Lord. Not only is this improper and misleading, but it has driven many thoughtful persons away from a truth which is of great value. No true Christian can be anything but glad over the prospect that Christ will return. But he may be led to feel that the promise of his coming is doubtful if it is hedged about with unscriptural and unreasonable theories of the time, the manner, and the purpose of his return.

False Prophets

Jesus warned his disciples against false prophets, and especially those who should arise in connection with the expectation of his return.[19] The apostles were equally anxious that Christians should not be led astray by evil teachers. Referring to the past and looking for a repetition of history, Peter said, "There arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies."[20] John is just as anxious, for he says, "Many false prophets are gone out into the world."[21]

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[19] Matthew 24. 5, 11, 24; Mark 13. 6, 22; Luke 21. 8.

[20] 2 Peter 2. 1.

[21] 1 John 4. 1.

We must remember that there are several kinds of false prophets. Some of these are intentional frauds. Of these Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."[22] These are to be tested by their works, not by their appearance.

But many false prophets are not willful impostors. They are deeply religious, but they have unwittingly allowed themselves to be made victims of spiritual pride. They have become wise in their own conceits,[23] a peril against which Paul frequently warned his readers. They are swollen with egotism, which betrays them into the folly of substituting their own fancies for the explicit word of the Lord.[24] They do not mean to be false prophets, but they run ahead of the Lord's revelation or commandment, and thus become deceivers.

Coleridge said, "He who begins by loving Christianity better than the truth will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and will end in loving himself better than all." People who think Christianity means a theory they have invented are often guilty of this self-love, though they may not know it.

Then there are other false prophets who

[22] Matthew 7. 15. [23] Romans 12. 16. [24] Galatians 6. 3.

have become such by permitting themselves to put more emphasis upon certain minor aspects of truth than upon the truth itself. They are eccentrics. They bulge too much on one side. They force a subordinate thing into undue prominence. This fault is found among some conscientious persons who are earnestly proclaiming the second coming of our Lord. They make more of the time, the manner, and the circumstances of his coming than of the sublime truth involved in his return, and the inspiring reasons for his final advent, as revealed in the Scriptures. Hence they give their imagination loose rein, or they press unwarranted interpretations of Scripture prophecy. They hold attention to dramatic accompaniments rather than to plain facts and their necessary results.

The consequences to the victim of false or misleading teachings are just the same, whether the prophet is sincere and conscientious, or purposely deceitful. In any case our Lord's words are applicable: "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."[25] By adhering closely to what is certainly known in the word of

[25] Mark 9. 42; see also Luke 17. 2.

God, after careful comparison of all scripture, and the total rejection of all purely human admixtures, we shall avoid the terrible fate of those who prophesy wrong things.

Troublesome Talk

Teachers of religion, however sincere, should pray to be delivered from the spirit of unprofitable discussion, "that they strive not about words, to no profit, to the subverting of them that hear."[26] It is not helpful to right thinking that we should enter into noisy battle with erroneous thinkers. The obligation to rebuke false teachers is constant. But, as Paul says, "The end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned: from which things some having swerved have turned aside unto vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm."[27] Error fails in the presence of simple truth. We need not smite false teachers with the arm of flesh. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"[28] is quite sufficient. Facts of human experience, which can never contradict the

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[26] 2 Timothy 2. 14.

[27] 1 Timothy 1. 5–7.

[28] Ephesians 6. 17.

word of God, are also a defense against error. Let things be stated as they are, and not as theorists may fancy them to be, and truth will prevail.

We are now to take a square look at the doctrine of Christ's second coming. The writer has no theory to construct. He has no plan of the ages to prove. He has no program for Christ to choose. He comes to his task, as he firmly believes, without a prejudice except his fondness for truth. He has determined to go as far as the Bible goes, but no farther. He will follow where the Scriptures lead without hesitation or reluctance. But when the Scriptures give no leading he will not venture to speculate. Revelation is enough. Speculation is more than enough, which means that it is useless and unhelpful. If God had wanted to give us more knowledge about certain mysteries, he could easily have inspired men to write additional revelations. There are many things about which we desire knowledge. Among them are queries which God has not seen fit to answer. When men tell us they have additional revelations from God, we should be very chary about accepting them. Saint Paul's prediction has often been verified: "The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having

itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables."[29] "Ye therefore, beloved, knowing *these things* beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen."[30]

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[29] 2 Timothy 4. 3, 4.
[30] 2 Peter 3. 17, 18.

CHAPTER II

TRUE PLACE OF THE THEME

At the close of his life John Selden, one of the most learned men in England during the seventeenth century, said to Archbishop Usher, "I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, but I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my soul, save this from the sacred Scriptures: 'For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.' "[1]

There is a sweeping splendor in this passage which justifies the devout scholar's confidence. It begins by tracing the source of salvation—"the grace of God"; it continues by affirming the universality of this grace—"bringing sal-

[1] Titus 2. 11–14.

vation to all men"; it declares the duty of man in view of this revelation—to "live soberly and righteously and godly"; it keeps the mind on the practical bearings of religion—"in this present world"; it directs the soul to the high incentives of a godly life—"looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour"; and it presents the object of Christ's atonement—"that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." If we keep these words in mind we shall the more easily put a true valuation on the doctrine of our Lord's return, which fills so prominent a place in this noble passage.

Every time a Christian recites the Apostles' Creed he affirms his belief that the Lord is coming again "to judge the quick and the dead." Every time he partakes of the Lord's Supper he should recall the words of Paul: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."[2] At all times he should remember that Christ, "having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation."[3]

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[2] 1 Corinthians 11. 26.

[3] Hebrews 9. 28.

In the service for the burial of the dead, as recited by Christian ministers of various sects, it is declared in language hallowed by centuries of use that the body is committed to the earth, "looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead," etc.[4]

In many confessions of faith adopted by Christian bodies there is agreement with the doctrine set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the following words: "Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day."[5]

An Ancient Belief

These quotations represent the conviction of the Christian Church from the earliest centuries, though it has been held with varying degrees of certainty and with a diversity of

[4] Methodist Episcopal Discipline, Protestant Episcopal Prayer Book, and many liturgies.

[5] Article III.

opinions concerning the time, the circumstances, and the results of Christ's second advent. It had a place of prominence in the thought of the earliest Christians. The writers of the four Gospels gave large space to it in the teachings of Jesus. The apostles made it conspicuous in their preaching, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, and more especially from the epistles which grew out of their work in establishing churches. In his earliest letters Paul dwells fondly upon it, and leaves traces of it in nearly all of his writings. It is given significant reference in the Epistles of Peter, James and John. It is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and shines through the book of Revelation.

It is evident that the apostles of Christ and the converts whom they first made were confident that their Master would speedily return to the earth, and most of them supposed he would come back during their lifetime. This conviction doubtless had much influence with the church immediately after Pentecost, and probably explains in part the willingness of the Christian community to set aside individual ownership of property for the common good.[6] They parted with their possessions under the impression that they would soon

[6] Acts 2. 44, 45; 4. 32–35.

have no need for them, since the Lord was quickly coming back to judge the world and begin his visible reign among men. They thought the words of Jesus concerning his coming again could bear no other meaning, as was natural enough.

In the centuries immediately following the apostolic period Christian teachers were deeply moved by the same considerations. Gradually it became evident that the expectation of an early return of our Lord was not to be fulfilled. Hence it was thought necessary to alter the construction put upon Christ's words. The discussions of theologians as the centuries moved on, accompanied as they were by very novel and unconvincing theories about the second coming of Christ, produced in the Christian world a spirit of weariness respecting the doctrine, and finally it became the general opinion that the teaching was so obscure that, while the promise of Christ's return must be regarded as genuine, the date of his coming was so indefinite that the whole question might be set aside as one of the insoluble mysteries of religion.

Modern Opinions

Revivals of interest in this subject have occurred at intervals, but unscriptural and

unreasonable theories pertaining largely to the date and circumstances of the second advent, reached through mechanical interpretations of prophecy, have interfered with its acceptance by thousands of Christians. In more recent times there has been a decided reawakening on the subject, accompanied by a new examination of the Scriptures, and also, it must be confessed, by the invention of crude theories relating to the order of events which may be presumed to take place at the second coming of Christ, and to the probability that this advent to judgment is near at hand. A considerable interest has thus been provoked, though the Christian world is far from agreement on the matter. We may distinguish broadly the following classes of thinkers on this question:

First, those who claim that the whole subject is of comparatively no importance. Their number is, unfortunately, very large. They vaunt themselves as exceedingly practical people. They ask, as was predicted of their sort, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[7] If they do not reject the doctrine out of hand, they at least question its

[7] 2 Peter 3. 4.

value. They say there is no need to bother one's soul over a thing which is a mere matter of speculation, and on which there is no agreement among scholars and theologians. Furthermore, if Christians were united in their opinion of it, the doctrine has no strong bearing, they say, on the making of character. There are many other essential doctrines about which the church is sure, and these are both necessary to salvation and helpful to spiritual development. Let us center our thought upon these teachings and put aside the discussion of Christ's return as a thing of utterly subordinate interest. To this criticism we shall give large attention later, but we may pause here to insert the fact that in the thought of Paul and other apostles there is much worth in keeping before one's mind the second coming of our Lord, as a means of shaping behavior to good ends. This passage, among several which might be quoted, is an instance in point: "When Christ, *who is* our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory. Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."[8]

[8] Colossians 3. 4, 5.

The Topmost Truth

The opposite extreme is represented by those who make the second coming of Christ almost, if not quite, the entire gospel. They find it taught everywhere from Genesis to Revelation; in the poetry, prophecy, history, and even the statistics of the Bible. They see it in almost every speech of our Lord recorded in the Gospels, in almost every utterance of the apostles. They find it foreshadowed or intimated in passages where the average student of the Bible would never expect it. Christendom has long been familiar with this style of biblical interpretation. There was a time in this country when controversy on the mode of baptism was foremost in the thought of Christians. Then advocates of various positions found proof texts for their favorite theory in every part of the Scriptures. There was also a time when a narrow doctrine of sanctification was heralded by noisy enthusiasts, who found substance for their pet convictions in every part of the Bible regardless of the connection or purport of the passage. Such gross abuses of Scripture have not entirely disappeared. The method is now being used to substantiate theories concerning the second coming of Christ. The Bible is regarded as a great bin full of texts, all of equal authority

and appropriateness, if they can be made to set up or strengthen a position already taken. It is as if the pieces of a picture puzzle had been thrown into a heap, from which it was the task of the skillful solver of difficulties to draw out those which could be combined to fit the pattern. The Bible is searched from one end to the other with a view to selecting those sentences from writers covering a period of at least fifteen hundred years which, when matched together by the hand of a cunning artificer, will produce a representation of a theory which he has already conceived. This is a dishonest way of treating the Scriptures. But, unfortunately, theology has been cursed by this bane almost from the beginning of the Christian Church.

Those who make the second coming of Christ unqualifiedly the most important of all doctrines go so far as to say it is the central and pivotal teaching of religion. A minister in New York declares that during a long pastorate he has scarcely preached a sermon or made an exegesis which has not either proceeded from or led to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. He and others of his ilk claim that the Bible cannot be understood without following such a process. This is the key which unlocks all the mysteries of the most

obscure passages in the Bible. The extremists who set up the claim that the second coming of Christ is the supreme doctrine of our religion, to which all others are subordinate, make even the atonement of Christ of minor significance. Not satisfied with such extravagance, they proceed to construct a mechanical and fantastic scheme of operations for Christ and his saints. On the strength of widely separated texts of Scripture, torn out of their immediate connection, they build up such a program for our Lord as could not be constructed on any sane and candid method of interpreting the Scriptures, and which has no support in the words of Christ and no justification in the reason of the case.

An Undue Stress

It is such unwarranted extremes which have driven many devout people away from the study of a subject which deserves earnest attention. It is difficult to understand how any judicious person could regard the second coming of Christ as the one exclusive doctrine of supreme importance. The most elementary knowledge of theology and the Bible ought to enable anyone to see that the incarnation, for example, is a doctrine of supreme significance, without which there could be no such thing as

Christianity. Jesus came into the world for the purpose of manifesting God in the flesh, and thus bringing to man a revelation surpassing anything the human mind had dared to conjecture. The sacrifice of Christ, without which there is no remission of sins and on which the salvation of the world depends, commonly called in theology the atonement, attended as it is by the profoundest mysteries, is certainly a doctrine of supreme importance. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, with its manifold implications respecting the future life, is certainly a doctrine of supreme importance, and was so regarded by the apostle Paul, whose words concerning the second coming of Christ are so thoroughly relied upon by the advocates of strange theories of our Lord's return. If Paul believed, as he said, that without the resurrection of Jesus Christ the faith of Christians would be vain, their preaching mere imposture, and themselves the most miserable of all men,[9] we must consider that the resurrection of Christ is a supreme doctrine. The work of the Holy Spirit is surely a doctrine of the first importance, without which we have no solid ground for our belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures or the work of Christ in the human heart,

[9] 1 Corinthians 15. 17–19.

or the gift of divine power in the operations of the church. Thus one might go on specifying doctrines without which the fabric of Christian theology would fall into hopeless confusion. To say that the return of Christ is to be placed on a par with some of these teachings is doubtless justified. It is the sequel of all previous revelations of Christ to the world. But to say that the return of Christ is the one supreme doctrine is like claiming that the only thing worth considering in a pyramid is its apex, that the foundations and the interior construction are of very slight importance as compared with the pinnacle which adorns the top.

People who put forward in demonstration of this doctrine the alleged fact that a majority of the most successful evangelists of our time make it central to their teaching, assert that which is of very little value, since it may be said with equal truth that there is no successful evangelist among us who does not believe in the incarnation, the atonement of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, the work of the Holy Spirit, and other great fundamental teachings. Upon which one of these doctrines shall we pitch for the reason of a particular evangelist's success? If he should drop out any of them, could he win? The

claim proves too much for the advocates of the surpassing value of the return of Christ as substance for preaching.

On the other hand, to deny any importance to the second advent is equally wrong and harmful, since (1) the doctrine would not have such space given to it in the teachings of Jesus and in the writings of his apostles if it had not a vital relation to the Christian gospel; (2) it is decidedly important as the culmination of Christ's work for the redemption of the world, without which his mediatorial ministry on earth would seem to be incomplete; and (3) it is the final verification before all worlds of Christ's sublime claim. Upon his return to the earth and the establishment of his reign among men no excuse will be left for not accepting him and his teachings.

The Sayings of Jesus

We shall get a clear idea of the relative importance of this doctrine if we notice the attention given to it in the New Testament. There are four Gospels which tell us what Christ said and did. The first three are called the synoptics, because they give practically one comprehensive and harmonious view of Christ's earthly ministry. They relate events as a narrative and do not deal with doctrines.

They state facts and report discourses, but they do not, like the fourth Gospel, spring from a purpose to persuade men to accept Christ as the Saviour. John says in explanation of his choice of materials: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name."[10]

Taking up the record, first of the synoptics, we find the following instances of Christ's proclamation that he will come again to the earth: When commissioning his twelve apostles to go forth "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," healing the sick and preaching the kingdom, he said: "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."[11]

When Jesus and his disciples were at Cæsarea Philippi, he said to them: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[12]

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[10] John 20. 31.

[11] Matthew 10. 23.

[12] Matthew 16. 27; Luke 9. 27; see also Mark 9. 1.

It is in this connection also that Jesus says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."[13]

When Jesus declares his Messiahship before the high priest at the time of his trial, his claims being called in question, he says, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."[14]

In the parable of the tares[15] we also have a clear declaration that Jesus is coming again accompanied with his angels, to gather out of his kingdom whatever is offensive, and to award glory to the righteous, who are to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

The judgment scene recorded in Matthew's Gospel[16] is introduced by this statement: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations."

On a certain occasion the Pharisees asked

[13] Mark 8. 38; see also Luke 9. 26.
[14] Matthew 26. 64; see also Mark 14. 62.
[15] Matthew 13. 36–43.
[16] Matthew 25. 31-46.

Jesus when the kingdom of God should come, and he replied: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you." Then turning to his disciples, he warned them not to be deceived by false leaders, but to remember that his coming would be as unmistakable as the lightning which flashes across the sky, and that men would be as preoccupied with the affairs of common life when he should return as they were in the days of Noah before the flood, and in the days of Lot before the destruction of Sodom.[17]

At the close of our Lord's parable of the unjust judge he declares that God will "avenge his elect, that cry to him day and night," and then exclaims: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"[18]

These are Christ's general proclamations and intimations of his second coming; to which must be added certain parables and other illustrations, some of which were evidently intended to emphasize the fact of his return, while others seem to have been spoken with that event in our Lord's mind, though they do not

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[17] Luke 17. 20–37.

[18] Luke 18. 7, 8.

specifically refer to it. Attention should be given to the parables of the virgins;[19] the talents, which is given in two forms;[20] the fig tree;[21] also to the similes of the servants who are to have their loins girded and their lamps burning,[22] the householder and the thief,[23] the faithful and unfaithful servants,[24] and the careless reveler.[25]

It will be noticed by those who read these passages that most of them are found in connection with our Lord's apocalyptic address, at the close of his public ministry, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[26]

We shall have occasion later to refer in detail to this address, in treating of the time, manner, and purpose of Christ's return. We now pause only to point out how large a space it fills in the recorded sayings of our Lord.

What John Has to Say

Having shown what Christ said about his return, as recorded in the first three Gospels,

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[19] Matthew 25. 1–12.
[20] Matthew 25. 13–20; Luke 19. 11–28.
[21] Matthew 24. 32, 33.
[22] Luke 12. 35–48.
[23] Matthew 25. 42–44.
[24] Matthew 25. 45–51.
[25] Luke 21. 34–36.
[26] Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.

we may now turn to the fourth Gospel; for we do not obtain all that he taught from the synoptics. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit has given to us John's wonderful Gospel, for it throws a flood of light on our Lord's teachings concerning his second advent among men. Certain things which are dark to us in the narratives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are illuminated by the records of that disciple whom Jesus loved,[27] and who stood closer to him than any of the other writers.

It is well for us to remember that the Gospel of John, and probably also the First Epistle of John, are the latest writings we have in the New Testament. This fact is easily overlooked because we get the impression that the arrangement of the books is chronological. This is wrong, however, because the Epistles of Paul are among the earliest contributions to the New Testament. The Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the books in which he expresses himself most abundantly about the second advent, are the first books in point of time which are found in the New Testament, and they doubtless reflect what the early disciples thought with regard to the second coming of Christ. The memorials contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were collected

[27] John 13. 23; 19. 26; 20. 2; 21. 7, 20.

about the same time that Paul was writing his first Epistles.

But when we take up the Gospel of John we are reading a book which was not written until after Paul had left the world, and not until the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been published. This Gospel is, in fact, the very latest, and is farthest removed from the theories of Christ's speedy return which had been entertained by Christ's disciples, and even by John himself, as we know by reference to John 21. 22. He had probably at one time expected our Lord's return during his lifetime. Perhaps he still held that expectation while he was writing the fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, he was now an old man, and Christ had not yet returned. Without doubt this modified his view of the subject. He does not doubt that his Lord will return, but being a man of deep reflection, he has seen in the preaching of his Master a deeper spiritual meaning than others have noted, and all through his Gospel, while he has taken up questions of the resurrection and the final judgment without hesitation, he has imparted to them a spiritual significance which he acquired from his close fellowship with Christ, and which is not so clearly intimated in the records of other Gospels.

This does not mean that he has not preserved

definite predictions of Christ's visible return. It is he who has given to us our Lord's wonderful farewell discourse, delivered the night before his crucifixion, in which are contained these words: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also."[28] A little farther along in the same address Christ says, "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you."[29] It is believed also that it is our Lord's return to which he referred when he said to Nathanael, "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."[30] There is a plainer statement of what Christ had taught in his rebuke to Peter's question about John, "What shall this man do?" Our Lord replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me."[31]

There are various other passages in the Gospel of John relating to resurrection and judgment, but which of necessity include the teaching of Christ concerning his second coming. These will be considered in their proper place, when other aspects of the subject are treated. They are mentioned here in order

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[28] John 14. 2, 3.
[29] John 14. 28.
[30] John 1. 51.
[31] John 21. 22.

that the reader may know they have not been overlooked.[32]

Paul and the Other Apostles

We have already mentioned the prominent place which the second coming of Christ occupies in the writings of Paul and other apostles; but we call attention to it again, because hasty readers of the New Testament are not likely to realize either the quality or the import of the matter on this subject to be found in these great productions. The theme has no reference in the Epistle to the Galatians, or the letter to Philemon, and but casual mention in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.[33] It is not prominent in the Epistle to the Romans.[34] But it is the most important element in the Epistles to the Thessalonians, it is conspicuous in the Epistles to the Corinthians, it appears often in the Epistle to the Philippians and in the letters to Timothy and Titus.[35]

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the

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[32] John 5. 25–29; John 11. 25, 26. See pp. 89-93.

[33] Ephesians 4. 30; Colossians 3. 4.

[34] Romans 2. 5, 16.

[35] 1 Corinthians 1. 4–8; 11. 26; 15. 23; 16. 22. 2 Corinthians 1. 14. Philippians 1. 6–10; 2. 16; 3. 11; 3. 20, 21; 4. 5. 1 Thessalonians 1. 10; 2. 19; 3. 13; 4. 13–18; 5. 1–10; 5. 23. 2 Thessalonians 1. 7–10; 2. 1–8. 1 Timothy 6. 13–15; 2 Timothy 4. 1; 4. 8. Titus 2. 11–15.

Epistles of James, Peter, and John, there is much direct statement or incidental allusion bearing on the subject.[36] The Epistle of Jude contains a single passage concerning final judgment which is a citation from the Book of Enoch.[37] The Apocalypse of John is replete with the theme.[38]

It would seem to be impossible for any student of the Bible merely to have brought to his attention the extent to which this subject pervaded the minds of Christ's apostles without being convinced of the great significance of a doctrine on which the Holy Spirit inspired these writers to express themselves so freely and fully. Surely, it is a very shallow judgment which holds that the second coming of Christ is so much a matter of speculation, that it can safely be put in the list of doctrines which make their appeal only to people who are fond of controversy.

The Right Proportion

Roughly speaking, we may divide opinion on this subject into three attitudes represented by:

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[36] Hebrews 9. 24–28; 10. 22–24; 10. 25; 10. 35–37. James 5. 7, 8; 1 Peter 1. 7, 13; 4. 13; 5. 1–4. 2 Peter 3. 1 John 2. 28; 3. 2, 3. 2 John 7.

[37] Jude 14, 15.

[38] Revelation 1. 7; 2. 25; 3. 3, 10, 11; 14. 14–16; 16. 15; 22. 20.

1. Those who think it is nothing.
2. Those who think it is everything.
3. Those who think it is something.

In the last named class there is much room for subdivision, according to the degrees of importance assigned to the doctrine by various persons who hold it.

Rejecting the idea that this doctrine is the supremely important teaching of Christianity, what rank should we give to it? An examination of Paul's writings will help us to a sound decision. We have seen how much space he uses on this subject. He, therefore, regarded it as highly essential to a complete understanding of the gospel. But that he did not think of it as the supreme doctrine is clear, if we scan his epistles in the order in which they were composed.

In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians the second advent is the principal matter, and this is true of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which was evidently written to correct some misunderstandings which had arisen with regard to his first Epistle.[39] When we come to the Epistles to the Corinthians, which were next in point of time among the writings of Paul, we find the subject still strong in the thought of the apostle, but not nearly so prom-

[39] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1.

inent as it was when he wrote to the Thessalonians. As we go on to the Epistle to the Romans, and then to the Epistle to the Philippians, which follow in chronological order, and then to the later Epistles, we observe a steady decline in the amount of attention he bestowed upon this subject. What is the reason for this?

1. It is plain that when Paul wrote his first Epistles his thought on the second coming had reached its highest point. He never afterward wrote anything which shows an enlarged view on the subject. There was nothing additional for him to say.

2. This does not necessarily imply that Paul changed his mind with regard to the significance of the doctrine, as some people have supposed. There is nothing in his later writings to suggest this, and it is altogether improbable.

3. The earliest Epistles, in which the second coming has the greatest prominence, were written to recent converts; the others to churches which had been established for some time. It was important that beginners in the Christian life should be taught this doctrine with emphasis; the older churches had, of course, already received it. Hence it was only necessary, when writing to them, that the sub-

ject should be mentioned without detailed exposition. Other teaching upon the application of the great gospel to the life of individuals would be required. This would naturally leave small space for a subject which by this time had come to be fairly well understood.

Our conclusion from all this must be that, while Paul regarded the second coming of Christ as a doctrine of large significance, he did not give it a place among the greatest of fundamental teachings of the gospel. In his profound and systematic exposition of Christian truth in the Epistle to the Romans he gives it no very conspicuous position. It is not a part of his central argument. He evidently esteemed it as among the rudiments of Christian theology, great in itself, but not great enough to dominate religious thought; it belonged, rather, to the second division of Christian belief.

Paul's evident rating of the doctrine we may accept without hesitation. It is quite impossible for the truth of Christ's second coming to fill the space in our thought which it held in the minds of the first Christians. They were expecting him to return within their lifetime. It is not certain that Paul shared this belief, but is unquestionable that he looked for Christ's return in a very short time. This

would make him feel the urgency of proclaiming the near approach of the second advent, and of explaining the circumstances under which it would occur. The other apostles were of the same mind. Hence they put it forward as a glorious hope whenever they preached and wrote. But it must not be forgotten that in the latest book in the New Testament, the Gospel of John, accompanied by his First Epistle, the subject not only has comparatively subordinate attention, but is also treated in a way totally different from that used in the other Gospels and in the Apostolic Epistles.

This is not a mere accident. Time had modified the thought of Christ's followers. The fact of his return was kept with undiminished faith and enthusiasm, but the time, manner, significance, and purpose of his coming occupied changed relations in their minds. This is the situation to-day. The lapse of centuries, the record of history, the development of Christianity, and the deepening of Christian experience have put the Christian student of the Bible in a position to place a sounder valuation upon the doctrine of Christ's second coming than was possible in a previous era. Ancient prophecy is clearer, the words of Jesus are plainer, the writings of the apostles

are more intelligible than ever. If we are deceived to-day by false teachers respecting the second coming of Christ, our fault will be greater than that of any who have gone before.

Moreover, we have the clear promise of divine help in the spiritual interpretation of the work of the gospel and the facts of human experience. Jesus said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you."[40]

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[40] John 16. 12–14.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST'S GREAT PROPHECY OF HIS SECOND COMING

MARTIN LUTHER said of Adam before his disobedience, "I believe he saw as clearly for a distance of a hundred miles as we can see for half a mile, and so of all the senses." What loss in bodily and mental powers sin may have worked in the human race we can only conjecture. But we cannot doubt that the sinless Jesus had a mind undisturbed by the infirmities which vex other men. In him dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."[1] His prophetic intelligence surpassed that of any ancient seer who spoke and wrote under divine inspiration before he came among men.

Therefore the words of Christ concerning his second advent must form the basis of all that we believe about that event; and whatever cannot be easily harmonized with his recorded teachings must be viewed with suspicion. In showing how much space was given to his second coming in his public ministry,

[1] Colossians 2. 9.

Christ's apocalyptic or eschatological[2] discourse at the close of his work was mentioned. Let it now be taken up in greater detail. Every reader should examine this discourse with great care and with repeated study until it stands out with sharpness in his mind.[3]

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" is the threefold question which started our Lord's address. It was suggested by the declaration of Christ that the glorious temple on which they had been gazing with pride a little while before was doomed to destruction. We learn from the account in Mark's Gospel that the question was asked privately by four of the disciples—Peter,

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[2] The term "apocalypse" is from a Greek word meaning "uncovering," "disclosure," "revelation." It is frequently found in the New Testament. It implies an exalted knowledge of God's purposes, and is often used specifically with respect to the final triumph of Messiah's kingdom. The book of Revelation is in the original called "The Apocalypse of John." The apocalyptic literature of the Bible includes much in the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, and Daniel. Other apocalyptic writings of importance which did not obtain a place in the Bible are the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Fourth Book of Esdras, the Assumption of Moses, and the Sibylline Oracles.

The term "eschatology" is from a Greek word meaning "the doctrine of last things." It embraces such subjects as death, the intermediate state, resurrection, judgment, the second advent, and the future existence of man.

[3] Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.

James, John, and Andrew;[4] and it was to them alone that Christ gave this wonderful prediction.

Principles of Interpretation

Thus we see that what is here recorded was really a conversation on "last things" rather than a set address. Jesus and his disciples had reached the Mount of Olives, where they paused to look back upon the city, of which the temple was the most conspicuous and important structure. Sitting down to rest a while with the small group of disciples who were specially excited by what he had said about the destruction of this noble edifice, our Lord began to talk of the mysterious future. To think of what followed as a formal speech is to increase the difficulty of understanding it. He was not delivering a sermon; he was speaking familiarly with his closest friends on a subject of the deepest interest to them and him.

This will explain in part why it is impossible to make a perfect analysis of the message given at the time. It is a flowing talk which winds in and out like a gentle stream through a wooded and heavily shaded valley. Every

[4] Mark 13. 3. Observe that these men are the two pairs of brothers who were called at the beginning of Christ's ministry.

careful reader will see that, while the destruction of Jerusalem is the starting point of this discourse, it soon develops something more remote in time and more impressive in character. Many scholars have imagined that they could tell just where Jesus ceased speaking of the national disaster soon to befall the Jews and began to describe the scenes connected with his return and the final judgment. But these writers show great disagreement as to the precise spot where this division appears. It is quite clear that the earlier portion of the record refers generally to the overthrow of Jerusalem, while the later is concerned with Christ's second advent and the end of the age. But the attempt to mark off within strictly defined limits a certain section for one event, and another section for the other event, is not successful. Very ingenious parallels have been drawn between the predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem and those relating to the final judgment, but these devices are not convincing. Some scholars insist that the whole discourse is devoted exclusively to the national catastrophe of the Jews, while others claim that almost all of it applies to the second coming of Christ.

No such extreme position is warranted. The utmost one can say is that in this address

Jesus is "forecasting the future from the moment of utterance to the final judgment." In the immediate foreground stands the destruction of Jerusalem, beyond which stretch events preceding Christ's return, the whole meaning of which time and eternity alone can reveal. There is such a blending of the predictions in these three accounts that it is not possible to separate all the elements and assign them with certainty to their several divisions, but many of the passages can readily be so placed. After the lapse of centuries we are able to see that our Lord gave marks by which future generations could unmistakably reach the actual intention of much that he said at this time. Some of his sentences surely apply to the destruction of Jerusalem, and cannot apply to anything else; and others with equal certainty refer to the end of the age and the final judgment, and cannot be explained in any other connection. But there are passages which could be interpreted as bearing upon either or both. As yet no one can say with certainty to which event utterances of this general character are to be applied, if only one was in our Lord's mind.

Practical Aim of the Address

But the lessons of faithfulness and watchful-

ness which Christ sought to teach by this discourse would be just as effective with those who heard it, whichever event was intended, and the application to our own spiritual needs is not affected by our inability to determine the question. Here we touch a most useful distinction, which should be a guiding principle in all our efforts to interpret Christ's words. Many persons study this prophecy only to speculate about its hidden meanings. They have a theory to uphold, or they have an itching desire to know that which could have little or no bearing on the spiritual life if it were perfectly understood. Our Lord spoke to these disciples, and through them to us, with no purpose to gratify an idle curiosity. He was moved by eagerness to urge upon them unswerving fidelity in the face of every difficulty, and he left them in no doubt that the day was coming when reckoning would be made with them in respect to their constancy to truth. How soon that crisis would occur he did not undertake to say, but that it was inevitable he declared in unmistakable terms. Therefore, it behooved every disciple to be vigilant and faithful to the highest degree. This is the duty which Christ laid on every follower to the end of time by means of his apocalyptic discourse.

Admonitions of this sort were given so frequently during Christ's ministry that we need not be surprised to find in the records of this discourse some things which are written elsewhere in the Gospels. For example, long before the occasion under consideration Jesus is reported by Luke to have used the comparison of his second coming with the suddenness and unexpectedness of the flood and the destruction of the cities of the plain, which is set down in Matthew's Gospel as a part of this discourse.[5] Again, we find that what Christ said about the necessity of watchfulness, as illustrated by the householder and the thief, and the faithful and unfaithful servants, is in Matthew's Gospel assigned to this discourse, while Luke inserts it in a very different connection.[6] It is not unlikely, therefore, that we have in these records of Christ's great prophecy not only what he said at this particular time, but also certain other things on the same subject which he said at various times. These utterances on different occasions the writers have placed here for the purpose of bringing our Lord's teaching on the matter into one exhibit, thus serving the

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[5] Luke 17. 20–37; compared with Matthew 24. 17, 23, 28, 37, 41.

[6] Luke 12. 39–46; compared with Matthew 24. 43–51.

convenience of the reader, and at the same time satisfying the author's sense of unity, for each wrote in his own way.

The feeling that this is probable is further strengthened by the fact that at the end of the discourse a variety of illustrations is used to enforce the injunction to be watchful, any one of which would have been sufficient for the purpose. In Matthew we have the picture of the householder who would have fortified himself against the thief if he had supposed the robber would come, and also the picture of the evil servant who says, "My lord tarrieth," and begins to beat his fellow servants. In Mark in the same connection we have pictures of the man sojourning in another country who has appointed each of his servants to his work and has charged the porter to watch. In Luke we have the warning against permitting the heart to be engrossed with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, so that the coming of Christ may appear as a snare. There are also immediately connected with the discourse in the account in Matthew the parables of the virgins, of the talents, of the judgment, in which all nations are divided into the sheep and the goats, and others to which we have already referred.[7] It is highly improbable

[7] See pages 37-39.

that these were all given on one occasion, though some of them have such perfect fitness that their omission at the end of the discourse would be a serious loss. As a climax of noble grandeur, the parable of the final judgment of all the nations[8] at the coming of the Son of man can only be compared with the last paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount which serves a like purpose.[9]

No true believer can doubt that the Holy Spirit has preserved in these three accounts every essential utterance of our Lord on this great occasion. But the narrators have written in their own several styles of composition. Every reader can see that, even if he has no knowledge of the Greek language. The English translation shows that each man wrote somewhat differently than the others, though the main outlines and much of the detail are similar. All the circumstances we have been rehearsing—the conversational style of Christ's address, the practical purpose of our Lord, the use of one event as the type of the other, the introduction of materials previously employed elsewhere, the freedom of narration permitted by inspiration to the several authors—help us to discern why it is difficult, if not impossible,

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[8] Matthew 25. 31–46.

[9] Matthew 7. 24–29.

always to say to which event the primary reference of a particular passage was made. But the impending fate of Jerusalem and the final judgment are each in a true sense the coming of the Son of man. Both mark the end of an age. One stands as the symbol of the other. The time of each is left indefinite, though signs of the approach of each are intimated. In several instances the same words could be used of both events.

It is very evident that in the minds of the disciples was the conviction that the things concerning which they inquired would all occur together, the destruction of Jerusalem, the return of Christ and the end of the age being regarded by them as three phases of the same event. When they reported our Lord's reply, of course, they were still under that impression, for he did not attempt to correct their confusion. It was not the first time that Christ had refrained from setting right their misunderstandings. He knew that time and experience would make plain what was now dark. When we consider how mysterious are many things connected with the future, we need not be surprised that these four disciples were confused in this instance, or that they transmitted their confusion to those who afterward incorporated their story in the written narratives of the

three Gospels which contain it.[10] This will explain many difficulties in the discourse.

The Foreground of the Picture

According to each of the accounts, Jesus begins by warning his disciples against the possibility of being deceived by what may be regarded as signs of his coming. He admonishes them not to be duped by appearances. False Christs shall arise, wars and rumors of wars shall multiply, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there shall be famines and earthquakes, and pestilences, and all kinds of tribulations. But these are not to be hastily taken as tokens of impending judgment.[11] "*These things* must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet,"[12] says Jesus. "All these things are the beginning of travail."[13]

The warnings given to the disciples ought to have kept them from the error of assuming that the second coming of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem were parts of the same event, and also ought now to keep people from

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[10] It is believed that Peter is the apostle whose preaching gave Mark, the substance of his Gospel, which was probably the first to appear.

[11] Matthew 24. 4–8; Mark 13. 5–8; Luke 21. 8–11.

[12] Matthew 24. 6; Mark 13. 7; see also Luke 21. 9.

[13] Matthew 24. 8; Mark 13. 8; see also Luke 21. 9.

assuming that any great catastrophe, such as the present European war, is sure evidence that Christ's second coming and the end of the age are at hand.

Christ then throws into the immediate foreground those things which must occur in the lives of his disciples before the impending judgment on Jerusalem can be fulfilled. They are to have great tribulations and to suffer great persecution, "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."[14] Every detail in this prediction was fulfilled before and during the siege of Jerusalem. The false Christs appeared. "Even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour."[15] "Wars and rumors of wars" were

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[14] Matthew 24. 4–13:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for *these things* must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail. Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

(Compare Mark 13. 5–8; Luke 21. 8–19.)

[15] 1 John 2. 18.

abundant in Judæa from the day of Christ's address till Jerusalem was assaulted about forty years later. Jews were massacred in many places within and far beyond Palestine. "Famines and earthquakes in divers places" are recorded by historians of the period. True Christians were persecuted unto death, and unfaithful disciples turned against one another. That false prophets, suborned by the enemies of truth, stirred the people into a delirium of excitement is well known from both secular and sacred writers.[16] Of course, "the love of many" would "wax cold," since they were not sufficiently grounded to endure persecutions so terrible.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Now follows in all three of the narratives a description of the vast tribulation which is to fall upon the people who are especially dear to the human heart of Jesus, and concerning which he gives kindly instruction to those who would escape its most awful miseries.[17] Again

[16] 1 John 4. 1, 2, 3.

[17] Matthew 24. 15–28:

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them

we see the plain marks of identification with the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent desolation of the Jews. The polluting of the temple both by Jews and aliens through civil discord and idolatrous profanation—the very climax of sacrilege—literally came to pass. The horrors of the siege cannot be set forth in words. Within the walls of the city was crowded a vast concourse of people who had come to celebrate the passover. The Jewish patriots were divided into three factions, and these frequently turned from their combined assaults upon the besieging Roman army to furious conflicts among themselves. The temple areas were drenched in human gore, which was mingled with the blood of the religious sacrifices. Captive Jews were crucified

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that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe *it* not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

(Compare Mark 13. 14–23; Luke 21. 20–24.)

by hundreds in plain sight of their kinsmen, and the wretched people inside the walls perished by famine and indescribable cruelties. More than a million Jews were slain during this siege, which lasted six months, and a hundred thousand were sold into slavery. When Jerusalem fell the Jewish nation ceased. In a very deep sense it was indeed "the end of the age."

The advice to flee to the mountains and to avoid being detained by any wish to recover personal property, the miseries predicted for nursing mothers, for those whose flight was in the winter, for those who on the Sabbath must for conscience sake tarry in their flight, and the whole vivid picture of tribulation "such as hath not been seen from the beginning of the world," find justification in the actual scenes of that frightful catastrophe.

Luke introduces his record of this section of the discourse, not, as Matthew and Mark, by a quotation from Daniel, but with the words, "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand," and concludes it with the words, "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.[18] It was truly the end of an age. The

[18] Luke 21. 20, 24.

words suggest that the overthrow of Jerusalem would be followed by a long era of desolation, which is precisely what has occurred. The words, "and except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved," seem perfectly natural when applied to this catastrophe; as do also the words "but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."[19] We need ask no other application.

When Jesus says: "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished,"[20] he refers without doubt to the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who make this passage a part of Christ's prediction of his second coming try to show that the word "generation" means the whole Jewish race, and say that it is obvious that this generation, or race, has not vanished, and, according to prophecy, never will. But this is straining beyond reason and need not detain us. Without a theory to support probably no one would ever think of calling "this generation" anything but what it would naturally mean, the people living in the time when Christ was speaking. Of course the removing of Judaism as the great obstacle to the gospel was the beginning of the end, and the destruction of Jerusalem was a symbol of

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[19] Matthew 24. 22.

[20] Matthew 24. 34; Mark 13. 30; Luke 21. 32.

final judgment. In that sense the passages might be shaped toward the second advent, but this is not the simple interpretation which plain sense would dictate.

We know that the disciples believed that Christ's second coming would occur either in connection with or shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. This will account for the fact that in reporting this discourse, when the disasters connected with the fall of the capital have been described, Matthew's Gospel says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days,"[21] and Mark's "In those days, after that tribulation,"[22] terrible manifestations of nature would presage the instant coming of Christ to judgment. Their inference from the words of our Lord was wrong, as we know, but as time in Christ's view is not measured by our little standards, we need have no trouble in reconciling this prediction with the facts. The interval may seem long to us, but to him it is but a watch in the night.

While it is true that the parable of the fig tree is one of those universal illustrations which in this instance could be applied either to the tokens that the destruction of Jerusalem was approaching, or that the end of the world

[21] Matthew 24. 29.

[22] Mark 13. 24.

was hastening, yet when found in such close connection with the statement, "This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled," as recorded in each Gospel, it would seem to be best understood in connection with the nearer event.

A similar judgment may be expressed with regard to several of the parables used by our Lord to illustrate the necessity of watchfulness and faithfulness, though this cannot be said with certainty concerning those illustrations which end with some such words as "So shall be the coming of the Son of man."[23]

The Farther Event

We may now consider those parts of this discourse which clearly and unmistakably point to the second advent of our Lord. When Jesus says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come,"[24] he is giving a note of time concerning the era of his return. By no natural method of interpretation can these words be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem or the beginning of what is called the Christian dispensation, though persons with a theory to support have

[23] Matthew 24. 39, 44.

[24] Matthew 24. 14; Mark 14. 10.

really undertaken to give them this application.[25]

"For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man,"[26] is evidently a straight declaration that, though his return is to be sudden, it will be unmistakable and the whole world will know that he has come back.

Yet the exact time of his return is hidden from every mind except that of the divine Father. "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."[27]

However, there is a considerable period to intervene before his return, for "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."[28] We are still in this stretch of history, and no man knows how much longer it will continue.

Whatever length of time will precede the second coming of Christ, he will find the world preoccupied with its customary order of life when he arrives. "And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.

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[25] See pages 102-104, where this question has attention.

[26] Matthew 24. 27.

[27] Matthew 24. 36; Mark 13. 32; Luke 21. 36.

[28] Luke 21. 24.

For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[29]

What stupendous changes are to take place in the world at Christ's second coming we may learn from this impressive prophecy: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."[30]

It may be said with perfect reverence for God's holy word that this language is highly figurative, as is much of the ancient prophetic

[29] Matthew 24. 37–39. Compare Luke 17. 26, 27.

[30] Matthew 24. 29–31; see also Mark 13. 24–27. Luke's language is most picturesque and varied (Luke 21. 25–28):

And there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh. See page 236.

literature, with which the minds of Jesus and his disciples were filled.[31] When Christ comes to take up the government of the world in person, vast and revolutionary changes will occur in the social, political, and moral structures, as has always been shown whenever God by some direct visitation has interfered with the history of nations. It is unprofitable to guess at the precise meaning of these symbolical words. It is enough to know that at Christ's coming mighty transformations will result. If the reader feels that to suggest symbolism here is to depart from our fixed purpose to take the Bible as we find it, or that hinting at a figurative interpretation of this passage is "handling the word of God deceitfully," he should turn to Peter's address on the day of Pentecost and read how the apostle made the prophecy of Joel an explanation of what was then happening:

"And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:
And your sons and your daughters shall
prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams:
Yea, and on my servants and on my hand-
maidens in those days

[31] Isaiah 13. 10; 34. 4; Ezekiel 32. 7, 8; Amos 9. 13; Joel 2. 28-32.

Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall
prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heaven above,
And signs on the earth beneath;
Blood, and fire, and vapor and smoke:
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the day of the Lord come,
That great and notable *day;*
And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on
the name of the Lord shall be saved."[32]

Now, the physical portents described in this prophecy did not come to pass, though other wonders equally great did occur. Yet Peter says what befell on that day was in fulfillment of what had been predicted by Joel centuries before, and Peter was under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who had inspired Joel. Our Lord's language is pictorial and vivid, and it makes a profound impression, as he intended it should. Similar prophecies are found in the Old Testament,[33] and the same figures are amplified in the book of Revelation and elsewhere.[34] They are not wise who belittle these words by making them refer to eclipses or showers of meteors, or who stretch them to

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[32] Acts 2. 7–21; see also Joel 2. 28–32.

[33] See page 70, footnote 31.

[34] Revelation 20. 11; 21. 1; 2 Peter 3. 10-13.

mean the literal destruction of sun, moon, and stars. On the promise of a new heaven and a new earth we may rely, but to insist that the prophecy in this discourse requires a dissolution of nature is unwarranted.

That Christ will, at his return, accompanied by a convoy of angels, "gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"[35] is one of those sublime facts without which his second coming would have no great significance, but upon which the soul of the believer rests with unlimited comfort and assurance.

Looking Backward and Forward

Let us now return to the incident which led to Christ's remarkable prophecy. He and his disciples have been surveying the temple, the courts of which had been polluted by unholy practices, an act of profanation which Jesus had but recently rebuked with stern words and deeds. Our Lord has just been saying that this splendid temple, its white marble structures glistening like a mountain of snow, its gilded roofs and pinnacles shining with dazzling luster, shall one day be utterly overthrown and with it shall fall the sacred city over whose approaching ruin he has but a

[35] Matthew 24. 31; Mark 13. 27.

little time since poured out a heart-breaking lamentation. In the Saviour's mind the uppermost thoughts are the transitory nature of all things earthly, and the everlasting security of his spiritual mission. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."[36] This utterance is the key to the whole discourse. His mind sweeps over the area of time yet to be and hovers over the triumphant end of the age when he shall deliver up the Kingdom to his Father.

But the question of the disciples, "When shall these things be?" constrains him to begin his prophecy at the point of time which he and they are occupying. The destruction of Jerusalem and its attendant circumstances of misery and woe—these are analogous to the final judgment of the world. Indeed, they are the fulfillment of the predicted punishment of unfaithful Israel. They constitute the tribulation at the end of Judaism which forecasts the final tribulation at the end of the world. Here we have a prefiguring and symbolizing of the judgment which would be pronounced upon all mankind when he should return.

Now, it is a fact which the history of two thousand years has established, that nothing

[36] Matthew 24. 35.

so epoch-making, so universal in its effect upon the progress of Christianity, has appeared since Christ's departure; and it is safe to predict that nothing more significant will occur in the interval, long or short, which precedes his return. The breaking up of the Jewish nation and the scattering of Israel far and wide was the greatest and most revolutionary event which could mark the close of one dispensation and the beginning of another.

But there was even more than the blending of two widely separated events, something more than the mere analogy between one event and the other. The destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of Israel actually stood in the foreground of a picture, the vista of which extended into the far-off ages. In the immediate future stood this great catastrophe, and far beyond it, rising like a distant peak above the broad plain stretching between, arose the tragic fact of the ultimate judgment of the world. Something like this occurred in the experience of the ancient Hebrew prophets. They predicted a visitation upon Israel, followed by a deliverance through the Messiah. Their language would indicate that they thought this was coming almost immediately. The delineations have all the coloring and circumstances of a local, national event. So the

matter stood in the foreground of their inspired imaginations. But we who live in later times know that their prophecies had to do with an event long removed from their point of vision. Seven hundred years after Isaiah proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, Christ entered the world; not to be the deliverer of the Jewish nation, but to be the Christ of all nations. Isaiah prophesied about Judah and Jerusalem and about the glory of the Messianic kingdom. We see his predictions fulfilled, not in a local prince such as he described, the head of the Jewish nation, but a cosmopolitan deliverer to whose standard all peoples shall ultimately yield.

Thus, when Jesus predicted the final judgment there stood in his mind first of all the terrible desolation of Judaism, and far beyond that, through the haze of many centuries, appeared the final judgment, of which the siege of Jerusalem was a type, an analogy, a symbol. Those who heard him in this great discourse saw only the near event, and from his language, which perhaps was open to such a construction, they argued that the end of the age and the return of their Lord would be coincident with the final judgment. This confusion they transmitted to following generations.

Reading the matter now in the light of his-

tory, we can readily mark the distinction. We see the type, the analogy, the symbol: and we look across the long centuries which have followed and say that Christ surely meant that his coming again was an event of the remote future. So clear, however, was his own vision and with such ease did he sweep over the vast territory lying between these two points that they virtually appeared together. The distance vanished and the sharply outlined facts came into immediate relationship. Thus, in certain parts of the world, where the atmosphere is exceedingly clear, mountains which are many miles apart seem to stand so close to the beholder that he could hurl a stone against their sides. But when he attempts to do this he finds that the missile falls far short of the object at which he has aimed. So, through the clear vision that Christ had of the future the far-off event was brought into such proximity to the immediate time that in his own speech there is little to mark the space which lies between. History is day by day slowly but surely measuring the distance.

CHAPTER IV

HOW AND WHY IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

In the discourse which we studied in the last chapter we find plain intimations of the manner, purpose, and time of our Lord's return. These we shall now examine more closely and compare them with predictions contained in other passages of the New Testament.

The Manner of Christ's Second Coming

It might be held that the precise way in which our Lord will return to the earth is a matter of minor importance, if it were not for the fact that the character of his second advent bears directly upon the purpose of his coming. When he made his first bodily appearance in the world it was as a helpless babe in the arms of an obscure peasant mother. When he comes the second time it will be as the risen, ascended, glorified and triumphant Lord of angels and men.

The Scriptures are very explicit about this. Jesus said, "The Son of man shall come in the

glory of his Father with his angels";[1] that he "shall sit on the throne of his glory,"[2] and that he shall be seen "coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory.[3] He drew a vivid picture of regal splendor in the words, "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations."[4] It is as a king that he is coming.

As befits royalty, he will come with great publicity. As at the destruction of Jerusalem false prophets and false Christs arose, and as through all succeeding ages similar deceivers have appeared, so in the days to come impostors will brazenly set up their claims to divine authority. But Jesus warned his disciples, "Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[5]

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[1] Matthew 16. 27.

[2] Matthew 19. 28.

[3] Matthew 26. 64; see also Mark 14. 62. Compare Matthew 24. 30; Mark 13. 26; Luke 21. 27.

[4] Matthew 25. 31.

[5] Matthew 24. 25–28; see also Mark 13. 21–23.

There will be no chance of mistake. He will be revealed universally, not as at his first advent, when wise men came from the east inquiring "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"[6] When he returns "every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him."[7] If people who are deceived by such avowed seers as "Pastor" Russell, Mary Baker Eddy, and others who have professed to usher in the new age by a spiritual second coming of Christ, had been better students of the Bible, they would have saved themselves from much humiliation. Christ's return will be unmistakable, and the fact of it will not be concealed from any creature.

Yet our Lord's coming will be so sudden and unexpected that the most frequent figure to characterize it is that of the "thief in the night." This is the simile used by Christ himself;[8] and it is adopted by Paul,[9] by Peter,[10] and by the author of the Apocalypse.[11] Literalists might insist that such passages mean that Christ at his second coming will enter the world unobserved; but this would be pressing a figure beyond the plain purpose for which it was chosen.

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[6] Matthew 2. 2.
[7] Revelation 1. 7.
[8] See Matthew 24. 43.
[9] 1 Thessalonians 5. 2.
[10] 2 Peter 3. 10.
[11] See Revelation 3. 3; 16. 15.

It is recorded that while the disciples were watching the ascension of their Lord they were addressed by two men in white raiment who said: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven."[12] Some scholars claim that the phrase, "in like manner," simply refers to the fact of Christ's return, and not to the process of it. As he went into heaven, so he will come out of heaven. The distinction is of no serious weight.

A detail given by Paul is most interesting. He says, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."[13] It would not seem important, apart from the relation of the manner of Christ's coming to his purpose, whether he returned on a radiant cloud, or a foam-crested wave of the sea; in solitary grandeur, or surrounded by a pompous retinue; with silence accompanying him, or attended by angelic choirs and celestial trumpeters. But it is the King who is coming to take his throne, and before him every knee shall bow, and to him every tongue

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[12] Acts 1. 11.

[13] 1 Thessalonians 4. 16.

shall make confession of submission to his scepter.[14]

The Purpose of Christ's Second Coming

One of the parables Jesus employs to illustrate the significance of his return describes a man who, before taking a journey to a foreign country, calls his servants together and places his property in their hands, assigning to them in trust the proportion he feels that each is capable of handling. "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them," and each is rewarded according to the manner in which he has discharged his responsibility.[15] Christ's return will be distinguished, therefore, by the measuring out of recompense. "And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, and from one end of the heaven to the other."[16] They shall not only be separated from the mass of mankind, but they shall also be appointed to their eternal destiny of blessing. The expectation of this was a perpetual joy to Paul, who could say at the close of his ministry: "I am already

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[14] Philippians 2. 4–11.

[15] Matthew 25. 14–30.

[16] Matthew 24. 31; see also Mark 13. 27.

being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing."[17]

Judgment

Retribution as well as reward is necessarily meted out by the Lord who comes to make reckoning with his servants. In Christ's apocalyptic discourse the punishment of the faithless is by suggestion and implication made more prominent than the recompense of the faithful. Yet all are to be judged, for judgment looks both to the righteous and the unrighteous. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."[18]

The judgment includes not merely the Jewish people, but all kindreds and tongues

[17] 2 Timothy 4. 6–8.

[18] Matthew 25. 31–33.

on the face of the earth. The gospel will then have been preached everywhere, or its ideals will have been presented to everybody, so that all will have had opportunity to accept the redemption which is in Christ. The judgment will, therefore, be fair even when gauged by human standards of equity, though entirely apart from man's opinions the Judge of all the earth must be incapable of doing wrong.[19] "He will judge the world in righteousness."[20] The heathen who perished without having heard of Christ will be judged on a basis well portrayed in the words, "Inasmuch as ye did it [or did it not] unto one of these my brethren, *even* these least, ye did it [or did it not] unto me."[21] That apparently will also be the determining factor in the judgment of all. The ancient Jews will be judged according to their response to the word of the Lord, however communicated in the ages preceding the advent of the Messiah. The whole human family will be under judicial scrutiny when the Son of man comes at the end of the world.[22]

How large a part this expectation of judgment played in the thought of the early Christians we see from the frequent references made to it in the Acts of the Apostles and in the

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[19] Genesis 18. 25.
[20] Psalm 9. 8.
[21] Matthew 25. 40, 45.
[22] 2 Corinthians 5. 10; Romans 14. 10–12.

various apostolic epistles. Peter, addressing Cornelius and his household of kinsmen and friends, declares that Christ commanded him "to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God *to be* the Judge of the living and the dead."[23] Paul, standing on Mars' Hill, tells the Athenians: "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."[24]

Christ is pictured as peering into the innermost recesses of the soul, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ."[25] He is described as opening all that is obscure in human life. "Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God."[26] It is he before whom we are to strive to appear "unreprovable in the day of our Lord Jesus

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[23] Acts 10. 42; see also 2 Timothy 4. 1.
[24] Acts 17. 30, 31.
[25] Romans 2. 16.
[26] 1 Corinthians 4. 5.

Christ,"[27] and in whose presence, if we are faithful, we "may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ."[28] We are to wait for God's Son from heaven, "whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come."[29] It is he who is to establish our "hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."[30]

The estate of men in the future is made to depend on their earthly attitude toward Him who is coming to judge all. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father."[31] To stand unabashed in his presence is the strong incentive to fidelity. "And now, *my* little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."[32]

Retribution

It is the failure to meet the test of fidelity

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[27] 1 Corinthians, 1. 8; see also Philippians 1. 10; 1 Thessalonians 5. 23; 1 Timothy 6. 13–15.

[28] Philippians 2. 16.

[29] 1 Thessalonians 1. 10.

[30] 1 Thessalonians 3. 13.

[31] Mark 8. 38; Luke 9. 26.

[32] 1 John 2. 28.

which will bring incalculable loss and enduring penalty at the coming of the Lord. The sharp contrast between the felicity of the faithful and the misery of the faithless is vividly expressed in the parable of the tares. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."[33] This will take place "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day."[34] The dark aspects of the judgment, on which the apostles dwell with an emphasis which is startling, seem to warrant the appeal to fear which many preachers of Christ in our day use with great effect. "Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands

[33] Matthew 13. 24–30; 37–43.

[34] 2 Thessalonians 1. 7–10.

of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."[35]

Yet what is so sinister to the wicked is everlasting blessedness to the righteous. The reward of fidelity is a character conformed to that of Christ. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[36]

Resurrection

Judgment necessitates resurrection. Nothing is specifically said about this in Christ's apocalyptic discourse, though it is implied in the gathering of the elect from the four quarters of the globe. But in the parable of the final judgment[37] it is affirmed that "all the nations" shall appear before Christ at his coming, and this expression must include all who sleep in the dust, as well as those who will be treading the globe at his appearing.

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[35] Jude 14, 15; see also Revelation 14. 14–16; Revelation 20. 12–15.
[36] 1 John 3. 2, 3.
[37] Matthew 25. 31–46.

The moment our minds are turned to the connection between judgment and resurrection we see how indispensable is the fourth Gospel. John says nothing about Christ's apocalyptic discourse. He was thoroughly acquainted with its contents, having been one of the disciples to whom it was privately communicated. Yet he makes no mention of it. Either he thought this unnecessary for his purpose, which was to persuade men to believe in Christ unto eternal life,[38] or he felt that what he was to report of Christ's teachings on judgment and resurrection was a sufficient and, at the time he wrote, a more important contribution to the subject.

Those who think that the second coming of Christ, as described in decidedly materialistic or physical terms by the other evangelists and some of the apostles, is the one staple doctrine of the Christian religion, without which all other tenets are meaningless, will have some difficulty in reconciling themselves to the significant silence of John in respect to these features so prominent in certain other writings of the New Testament. John does not avoid the idea of Christ's coming to final judgment, but he does not make it of central interest. Others had said nothing about

[38] John 20. 31.

resurrection as preceding judgment. That thought would be implied even when not expressed, but he gives it much attention.

Furthermore, he brings out the spiritual meaning of the resurrection as a present experience. When Jesus told Martha that her brother should rise again, she said unto him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day." Then Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die."[39] Here is a clear reference both to the final summons of the body to judgment and also to the possibility of a personal and present resurrection through faith in Jesus Christ, the latter being spiritual and not material.

Present Spiritual Realities

In the great passage, John 5:25-29 inclusive, we have the same distinction clearly brought out. It is preceded by a general statement: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life."[40] Jesus then proceeds to make even

[39] John 11. 25, 26.

[40] John 5. 24.

more definite his explanation of the spiritual resurrection, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."[41] Here it is very apparent that what is implied is a spiritual resurrection. All the people who are dead, in the sense of being without the spiritual life of fellowship with God, who hear his voice and respond to it shall live, in the sense of coming into that fellowship. Jesus reiterates the statement that he has the power thus to give life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself."[42] There is coupled with this a like "authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man."[43] This apparently creates astonishment in the minds of those who are listening to him, and he then proceeds to pass over from a consideration of the spiritual resurrection and judgment to the final resurrection and judgment. He says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the

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[41] John 5. 25.
[42] John 5. 26.
[43] John 5. 27.

resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."[44] Here, it is to be noted, all that are in their graves are to hear his voice. But not all of these are to live, in a spiritual sense, but only those who have done good. Those who have done evil are reserved for condemnation. It is not said of them that they shall live. The implication is that in the spiritual significance they shall continue to be dead. Thus, at the final judgment only those who have lived spiritually are appointed to everlasting glory, and those who have not lived are appointed to everlasting shame. This has an important bearing upon John's conception of the second coming of Christ. He believes thoroughly in the final judgment, but he also puts forward what was overlooked by the other writers, namely, the fact that the process of resurrection and judgment is continuously going forward.

In the farewell address of Jesus as recorded by John (14th to 17th chapters inclusive) Jesus is represented as elaborating an even more luminous conception of his spiritual power among men. He says, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."[45] That is a plain intimation

[44] John 5. 28, 29.

[45] John 14. 3.

of the final coming of our Lord to reward those who have been faithful to him. But this is not to be regarded as his only coming, for he also says that by the spiritual union with them they shall be conscious of his presence. "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also. In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."[46] In the sixteenth chapter this idea is still further developed. Here he shows that the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is really his own coming to give spiritual guidance and illumination to them. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you."[47]

Some devout students of the New Testament say that this explains what Jesus meant when he said, "There are some of them that stand

[46] John 14. 18–20. [47] John 16. 13–15.

here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[48] They felt this spiritual presence in their own hearts after his bodily presence had been withdrawn from them, and they had a mighty confirmation of it when, on the day of Pentecost, with great power the Son of man did manifest himself by various wondrous exhibitions and especially in the conversion of a great multitude of people. It will, therefore, be seen that in the Gospel of John we not only have a new element added to the general doctrine of the second coming of Christ, but we also have a more profoundly spiritual interpretation of that event than it is customary for some strong advocates of the second advent to welcome when they dilate upon this doctrine.

A Double Resurrection

When we proceed to examine the writings of Paul we find that the resurrection of the body is by him identified with the spiritual resurrection through obedience to Christ. The aspiration of the great apostle is, "If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead."[49] This is to be wrought through a personal identity of experience with Christ in suffering and death. The result of this will

[48] Matthew 16. 28. [49] Philippians 3. 11 .

be a marvelous transformation. "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, *that it may be* conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.[50]

The process of that wonderful transformation Paul has recorded in words of immortal beauty: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: we all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."[51]

The order of the resurrection in Paul's thought gives precedence to those who are asleep in Christ. "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest,

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[50] Philippians 3. 20, 21. See Burial Service, Discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church.

[51] 1 Corinthians 15. 51–54.

who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."[52] "But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming."[53]

Climax of the Advent

Thus the purpose of Christ's second coming is truly to finish his mediatorial ministry on the earth, and to establish before all intelligences his claims to universal sovereignty. His enemies shall be mute in their own defense, though they mourn when he comes to judgment.[54] "Then *cometh* the end, when he shall

[52] 1 Thessalonians 4. 13–18.

[53] 1 Corinthians 15. 23.

[54] Matthew 24. 30; Revelation 1. 7.

deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death."[55]

With the abolition of death, life in its highest possibilities will move on forever. The invisible world will become visible. The celestial will absorb and transfigure the terrestrial. What science and philosophy have vaguely dreamed to be true will be proved fact—beyond the material universe is the real universe, of which the physical order known to man is but the symbol. At Christ's second coming the invisible will break in upon the visible, the eternal will envelop the temporal. No mightier overthrow of the materialism which counts at highest worth the things of time and sense could be imagined.

The mastery of matter by mind, of flesh by spirit, so frequently foreshadowed in the earthly achievements of man, will be established with unquestionable emphasis when Christ comes again. In glorified bodies we shall live, indifferent to external difficulties, since these will have disappeared. Hunger and thirst, pain and anxiety, suffering and

[55] 1 Corinthians 15. 24–26.

death, now so powerful to disturb the mind and quench the better moods of the spirit, will have no existence.

With the supremacy of good over evil, at the coming of Christ, the last influence hostile to man's peace will have been banished forever. The purpose for which man was created will be realized. Body and spirit will alike be free from taint, and the divine image will shine in undimmed splendor. The new heaven and the new earth will mean not merely a physical transformation of the universe, but the regeneration of human society. The dream of universal peace and righteousness will be fulfilled. The knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. Into this climax of human history we shall enter with joy if we love our Lord's appearing. "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord."[56]

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[56] 1 Corinthians 15. 57, 58.

CHAPTER V

WHEN IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

THE noblest example of Gothic architecture in Europe is the Cathedral of Cologne, its great towers lifting their pinnacles more than five hundred feet into the sky, its vaulted ceiling springing two hundred feet from the pavement, its spacious interior adorned with columns and arches of massive strength and beauty. Its foundations were laid in the thirteenth century, and its architect went the way of all flesh. Generation after generation took up his plans and slowly carried them forward. Occasionally for long intervals the work languished, and parts of the structure were even allowed to decay. But a hundred years ago eagerness to finish the cathedral revived, funds were gathered from many sources, enthusiasm for the task captivated all Germany, and in 1880, six hundred years after the architect had dreamed this symphony in stone, the world looked upon its completed splendor, and praised the genius which had conceived it.

Nineteen hundred years ago, in a prophetic

vision of unmatched sublimity, Jesus outlined his conception of a world-religion, and of a church in which to embody it. Then he went away to heaven, committing to his disciples the task of making his dream come true, and promising to return some day to receive and reward the results of their fidelity. Generation after generation has toiled at the plan of the Master, and through every century devout souls have wondered when the glorious edifice would be finished, and at what hour they might expect their Lord.

The earliest mention of what on the surface appears to be a point of time concerning the return of our Lord is found in connection with the commission Christ gave to his apostles, when he bestowed upon them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness."[1] He then sent them out "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and warned them that they would meet with persecution, and would "be hated of all men" for his name's sake, but assured them, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," a promise we find in Christ's apocalyptic discourse expressed in the same words;[2] a fact which lends

[1] See Matthew 10. 1–23.

[2] Matthew 24. 13; Mark 13. 13.

probability to the suggestion that in the record of that address there is not merely what Jesus said on the occasion of its delivery, but also much which had been said by him at other times. Shall we say that some things he uttered then were transferred to other portions of the narrative from that discourse, or that many pregnant sayings of our Lord were repeated frequently in order that they might not be forgotten?

The Time of Christ's Second Coming

In any case, after Jesus had predicted the trials which the apostles would confront, he gave them this advice and encouragement: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."[3]

What can the phrase "till the Son of man be come" mean? As far back as Chrysostom it was regarded as equivalent to, "till help shall come from the Son of man," but this is altogether too vague. Others have interpreted it to signify "till Christ shall be triumphant," as in his resurrection he did become victorious. Some have asserted that the words refer to the coming of the Son of man in the outpour-

[3] Matthew 10. 23.

ing of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Others have said the prophecy was fulfilled through the destruction of Jerusalem. But it is possible to conceive of this promise as literally applied to the second advent, if we admit the likelihood that some Jews will still be hostile to Christ when he returns to judge the living and the dead. In such an interpretation there is nothing to intimate a definite hour for this event.

In his apocalyptic discourse Jesus plainly intimated that his coming to the final judgment of the world would be delayed. This did not impress his first disciples, who were eager that he should return in their lifetime, and it does not sufficiently impress those who in this age are anxious that he should return. But, in the light of nearly two thousand years of history, we ought to be able to understand these intimations.

In the parable of the virgins it is stated, "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."[4] In the illustration of the evil servant, that recreant one says, "My lord tarrieth."[5] In the parable of the talents it is said, "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh."[6] These sentences would have no meaning if they were not taken to signify

[4] Matthew 25. 5. [5] Matthew 24. 48. [6] Matthew 25. 19.

that Christ was not going to return at once. The emphasis in each of these parables is laid on the certainty that he will come and the uncertainty of the time of his return.

Gospel Preached Everywhere First

What the time of that delay was to cover Jesus explicitly told. He said that it would stretch over the period needed to proclaim his gospel to the ends of the earth. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."[7] Those who believe that Jesus will return in the immediate future have an answer to this. They say that in some scriptural sense, unknown to us, the gospel has been preached to all nations. They even quote Paul as saying that the gospel had in his day already been preached everywhere.[8] It is not the same thing, however, to speak of the gospel as having been launched out generally upon the world and to speak of it as having been preached everywhere among men. There are even those who say that, astonishing and incredible as it may seem, the early disciples of our Lord did actually during their lifetime preach the gospel to every nation.

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[7] Matthew 24. 14.

[8] Colossians 1. 23.

Some who are not looking for Christ's early return, but who believe that all prophecies respecting the second advent were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem, and that no other coming of Christ in bodily presence is therefore to be expected, reduce this saying of Jesus to mean that it was only necessary that the habitable world known to the disciples of Jesus should receive the gospel before his return. They point to the fact that this is what "the world" evidently signified to Luke, who in describing the throng which witnessed the marvels of Pentecost says, "Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven;"[9] and then proceeds to give a very limited list of peoples and kindreds. Other passages of similar import are quoted in support of this view. Perhaps these would be convincing if in this instance we were not dealing with the mind of Christ, rather than with the minds of ordinary men. Our Lord was not fettered by a popular notion. In his vision "the world" was far vaster than the civilized lands with which his disciples were dimly acquainted. Furthermore, he saw not merely the age in which his hearers were living, but the ages which stretched away into the indefinite future, with the innumerable

[9] Acts 2. 5; see also verses 9, 11.

multitudes of men and women who should occupy them.

It is manifestly wrong to affirm that Christ's command to evangelize the world has been literally fulfilled, while in immense areas of heathen blackness there are but little pin-prick holes through which the light of the gospel may shine with feeble ray. With six hundred and seventy-five millions of pagans now living on the earth who have never so much as heard the name of Jesus Christ, it is an offense against reason and a deceitful handling of the word of God to declare that the gospel has been preached as a witness unto all nations. Doubtless there are a few persons here and there in every national division of the earth who have heard the gospel; but it is a foolish thing to say that this is what Christ meant by his prediction; when we know that he said definitely: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This involves something more than merely getting the gospel over the edge of a nation here and there. Those people who are so indolent and so impatient, that they want Christ to come back as soon as possible to do the work which has been committed to them, ought to remember that he has declared he will not do this until they have accomplished their whole duty

by spreading the knowledge of his gospel universally through the earth.

Time Unknown to Jesus When on Earth

The one statement above all others which should make the cock-sure heralds of Christ's near approach hesitate with some degree of modesty is this: "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."[10] If Jesus did not know in the days of his flesh, then we cannot be convinced that any man knows, for we have never met any man with more spiritual intelligence than Jesus. It may seem startling to read that Christ did not know the hour of his own return to the earth, but it is another proof that when he came to this world and took on himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, he did indeed empty himself of the prerogatives and privileges of deity, as Paul said.[11] We know that, as a child, he increased in wisdom and stature; that is, as he grew in years and in bodily development, so he grew in knowledge and wisdom and was subject to the same law of development as that to which we are subordinated.[12] This means that there were

[10] Matthew 24. 36; Mark 13. 32.
[11] Philippians 2. 7.
[12] Luke 2. 52.

times when he knew more than at other times. He was limited and conditioned by his human life.

We have sure evidence of this in the expressions he made of surprise. Sometimes he declared his astonishment at the faith of individuals, and at other times he marveled at their unbelief.[13] Now, the element of surprise would have been impossible to him had he known in advance everything about human beings and the conditions of life about him. In the days of his flesh, according to his own testimony and other scriptures, he voluntarily limited himself.

It will be remembered that he said he had the ability to summon twelve legions of angels to deliver him from his enemies, but he refrained from doing this. Perhaps also he could have known the time of his second coming had he desired it. But he had emptied himself of the privileges and prerogatives of the Godhead, and he voluntarily refused to inquire of the Father when this time should be. That limitation of himself is as sublime as any other element of self-restraint which we find in his great renunciation for the sins of the world. It puts him into sympathy and fellowship with all men, on a common level of priv-

[13] Matthew 8. 10; Mark 6. 6.

ilege. He did not know. The angels did not know. It behooves us to be a little chary about boasting that the times and seasons are known to us.

An Interval to be Used

Of course Christ knows now when he will return to the earth. Having gone back to the heavenly glory at the time of his ascension, he resumed all that of which he had emptied himself at the time of his incarnation. He is on the throne of eternity. We preach that he is God.[14] But though he is omniscient, and could reveal the exact hour of his return to the earth, he has not done so. The wisdom of this reticence is perfectly obvious even when measured by human standards. It is not difficult to imagine the results which would follow the definite fixing of the time of his return, because we have illustrations of the consequences which have come to men and society when, at different periods of the world's history, devout but misguided persons have set the hour for Christ's return. Then great laxity of devotion to duty was manifest; the necessary activities of life were interrupted, and great evils followed, which were increased by the disappointment experienced after the

[14] John 1. 1; Colossians 2. 9.

fixed period had passed, and it became perfectly clear that Christ was not yet to return.

Paul found it necessary to correct the impression apparently made on the minds of the Thessalonians by his first epistle that Christ's return would be almost immediately. He wrote to them: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise; for *it will not be,* except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."[15] If there are predicted events yet to occur, it is puerile to say that Christ may come any minute.

Nevertheless, "in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh," said Jesus;[16] for which reason we are enjoined, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knock-

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[15] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1–3. Concerning "the man of sin" see pages 175-181.

[16] Matthew 24. 44.

eth, they may straightway open unto him."[17] He will return soon.

"For yet a very little while,
He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry."[18]

"I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown."[19] Perhaps Peter's words are the best explanation to be given to the apparent incongruity of saying that Christ will shortly return, and yet putting up milestones which must be passed before he can come: "But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[20]

Peter addressing the throng on the day of Pentecost exhorts them to repent and be converted, that "there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old."[21] In Luke's narrative of Christ's apocalyptic discourse he says that Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot "until the times

[17] Luke 12. 35, 36.
[18] Hebrews 10. 37.
[19] Revelation 3. 11.
[20] 2 Peter 3. 8; Psalm 90. 4.
[21] Acts 3. 19–21.

of the Gentiles be fulfilled," an expression which, taken in conjunction with many other passages of Scripture, would seem to imply a considerable period during which the nations outside of Israel would have the opportunity of receiving the gospel of Christ. Through that era we are still passing. When it will end depends on the zeal and wisdom with which Christian people push the project of world evangelism which Jesus entailed upon them.

Those who attempt to diagram the ages, basing their calculations on the prophecies of Daniel, as though these made a calendar of the future, are engaged in a foolish piece of business. From this seer there is a quotation in the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus, who, therefore, must have been thoroughly acquainted with his writings, as doubtless were also the disciples. Had our Lord interpreted Daniel as some adventists do to-day, he would not have said that he did not know the day or the hour of his return. What we know is, that Christ will come again, that he will come at a time when the world will be going on in its customary procedure, and when all the appearances will be against the supposition that he is coming. For that hour we are to await the decision of God.

The Sum of the Matter

Having put together all that is essential in the recorded sayings of Jesus about his second coming, we may now ask: What is the necessary conclusion from this examination of Christ's personal teachings, apart from all human speculations and philosophic theories?

1. We cannot accept the view held by some expositors, both ancient and modern, that the doctrine of the second advent is only a deposit or residuum of Judaism, which in its latest development before the birth of Christ was luxuriant in what is called apocalyptic literature; that the notion of Christ's second coming was useful in sustaining the early Christians through their terrible persecutions, though it was a conception certain to give way to purer and more spiritual ideals after time had been given for reflection and experience had corrected the mistakes of the earlier period. That would be equivalent to saying that Jesus had made an error, or that the New Testament writers had ignorantly misrepresented Christ, or had willfully deceived us concerning what he actually said. From these alternatives we turn away with contempt.

2. We cannot avoid the conviction that the words of Jesus were open to different inter-

pretations at different times, and that this is accountable in large measure for the confusion into which the minds of his disciples were thrown. Sometimes our Lord spoke of his coming again as though it were to occur during the lifetime of those who were listening to him. Sometimes, on the contrary, it is said that his second coming is at a distance. There are also parables connected with Christ's teaching of his second coming which would seem to affirm that he will come quickly and suddenly, and still others which apparently declare that he will delay his coming. After his resurrection he says to the disciples who are anxious to know whether the kingdom will be restored to Israel, "It is not for you to know times or seasons,"[22] thus hinting that the period preceding his second coming is an indefinitely long one.

3. We have seen how the disciples did confuse the destruction of Jerusalem with what Christ called the end of the age. May they not also have mixed the final coming of our Lord to judgment with other comings of the Son of man such as are expressed in the Gospel of John? For example, Jesus did come again at his resurrection, and in a visible, bodily form, and in a real sense his spiritual

[22] Acts 1. 7.

kingdom was then in operation on the earth. Again, the Son of man surely did come on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples and the Church of Christ was inaugurated with great power. Such comings of the Lord make it possible for us to understand the words of Jesus when he says, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished."[23] "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[24] But such comings of Christ, as we have already said, are not to be identified with his final coming to judgment.

4. For the same reasons we must distinguish from his final advent to judgment other alleged comings of the Lord: (1) Some say his second coming occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem. In a sense this is true, but it was not the final coming to judge the whole earth, and it was not a visible, bodily coming. (2) Some say that he is always coming in the providential occurrences of history. He came in the German Reformation, in the French Revolution, in the Wesleyan Revival, in the emancipation of the slaves in the American Civil War,

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[23] Matthew 24. 34.

[24] Matthew 16. 28; see also Mark 9. 1; Luke 9. 27.

in the modern revivals of religion, in the present European conflict, and in other great epochal events. In a sense this is true, but not one of these events can be called a personal coming of Christ to judgment which he so plainly predicted. (3) Some say that Christ is always coming at the death of each individual, and that such parables as the virgins can mean only this. There is doubtless an element of truth in such interpretations, for at death there is an end of all probation and an entrance into judgment. The results of character are actually made up, and the ultimate fate of the soul has been determined. Nevertheless, this is not to be identified with a personal, visible return of Christ such as he predicted.

5. All that Jesus is recorded as saying may be harmonized with what is brought out most clearly in the Gospel of John. It is evident that by him the coming of the Lord was considered under a twofold aspect. It could be thought of as a dispensation rather than a single event. It began with the spiritual advent of Christ at his resurrection, when with great power he returned to assume a spiritual sovereignty over the sons of men, to continue his power through all the history of the Christian Church until the end of the present age,

when, the spiritual work of salvation having been accomplished and the kingdoms of this world having become the kingdoms of our Lord, he shall come to receive his inheritance in a bodily, visible form, to raise the dead, to judge the world, and to begin his eternal and undisputable reign.

With that conception of the second advent all that Jesus predicted is in full accord. In other words, the second coming of Christ will be at the climax of Christian development and not at the collapse of the Christian Church. His second coming is the goal of human history and not the gulf into which all human development is buried. His gospel is to be preached everywhere. He will give every man a fair chance, and when the probation is ended for individuals, and when his church, under his personal guidance, has carried the world forward to righteousness as far as it can be brought, and civilization has attained its fullest fruition, he will return to claim his own. That is, the exceedingly old order will have come to an end, and the glorified heavenly state will begin.

Jesus uttered some things which confirm this teaching by what a plain mind, undisturbed by vagaries and preconceptions, ought to regard as unmistakable proofs. In spite of

the fact that his coming at the climax will find many people unprepared and everything going along as before, and in spite of the fact that alarming potents will accompany the advent, Jesus taught that this approach would be gradual and that the progress of his kingdom upon the earth would be continuous. In his parable of the leaven,[25] his parable of the mustard seed in the same connection, his parable of the growing corn,[26] the kingdom of God is described as subject to the law of growth. It would seem certain that Jesus recognized the necessity of a long preparatory process. He was aware that his kingdom would be established through a natural course of human development. It would involve the evangelization of the various races.[27] All this would require a long process, but it would be a course of increase in the earth. Jesus saw with such vividness that what was far off seemed near to him. His disciples were greatly impressed by his words. For this reason they very naturally fell into the mistake of supposing that his second advent was near. But he stated distinctly that when he came back the

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[25] Matthew 13. 31–33. For discussion of this parable see pages 186-189.

[26] Mark 4. 26–29.

[27] Matthew 24. 14; 26. 13; Mark 13. 10; Luke 21. 24.

ancient order would come to an end, and the glorified heavenly state of the saved would begin. That old order shows no evidence of being brought to a speedy termination. The second advent of our Lord is still an event of the indefinite future.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS CHRIST DOING NOW?

When the Emperor Julian, surnamed the Apostate, made an expedition against the Persians, one of his followers asked a Christian of Antioch, "What is the carpenter's son doing now?" The humble Christian said, "The Maker of the world, whom you call the carpenter's son, is employed in making a coffin for the emperor." A few days later the announcement was made in Antioch that Julian was dead, having been mortally wounded in a battle with the Persians.

The same question asked by that contemptuous disbeliever of the olden time is frequently asked in our day, and we repeat it for ourselves, not in the spirit of the enemy, but of the lover. We also give ourselves an answer totally different from that uttered by the Christian at Antioch. Our reply does not indicate vengeance from our Master, who, when James and John wished to punish the Samaritans for their inhospitality to him, "turned, and rebuked them."[1] Jesus so uniformly declared that his mission among men

[1] Luke 9. 55.

was to save, not to destroy, their lives, that every rhetorical description of Christ's triumphs in terms of martial conquest is an offense. Religious teachers who embellish their oratory with similes of butchery to make more vivid the victories of our Lord, doubtless thinking thus to glorify his name, are far from the line of propriety, and should remember that Jesus himself said, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."[2]

It is altogether likely that as soon as their Master had departed from them the disciples began to ask one another, "What is Christ doing now?" It is said in the record: "He led them out until *they were* over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven."[3] The narrative is filled in by the same author in another place where he says, "And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven."[4] We complete the story by turning back again to

[2] Luke 19. 10. [3] Luke 24. 50, 51. [4] Acts 1. 10, 11.

Luke's Gospel and reading: "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, blessing God."[5] Yet they were doubtless asking one another, from time to time, "What is Christ doing now?"

If His Return Be Not Soon

We know that the apostles were expecting their Master to return very soon, notwithstanding the cautions against such a mistake which he had given them, as has been shown in preceding pages of this work. He had warned them against too much curiosity about times and seasons. He had commanded them to tarry in the city until they were "clothed with power from on high."[6]

He had told them they were to be his "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."[7] Instead of seeing in these instructions clear suggestions that he would not return immediately, they kept watching for him every day. They thought of him as just withdrawn temporarily behind that cloud which had "received him out of their sight,"[8] from which he would speedily issue to bring in his

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[5] Luke 24. 52, 53.
[6] Luke 24. 49.
[7] Acts 1. 8.
[8] Acts 1. 9.

eternal and universal sovereignty over the earth. To heaven he had gone, from heaven he would come, and that right early. In one respect they were more intelligent than many modern Christians—they believed heaven to be near at hand. But as the days moved on, and Christ did not return, they could not help asking, "What is he doing now?"

Pentecost came with its mysterious baptism of power, enabling them to rejoice in the fulfillment of a promise which they had not till then understood, and confirming them in the belief that all other promises of their Master would have equal verification. Persecutions poured upon them, and they suffered many cruel hardships, but they had received one answer to their question—"What is Christ doing now?" He had said the Spirit of truth would be sent by him and his Father, and his word had been kept. They were to receive another glorious proof that Christ was in action for their sakes somewhere. When Stephen was about to sink into sleep, pounded to death by the stones flung at him by his persecutors, he suddenly cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."[9] Christ rising as if to extend help to his fallen saint is the in-

[9] Acts 7. 56.

spiring picture the Christians of the day carried in their hearts to assure them that the Son of man had not deserted them till the hour of his return. In heaven he still kept royal guardianship over them.

After nineteen centuries we are frequently putting to ourselves the query which at the first troubled the apostles, "What is Christ doing now?" We have all the reasons for answering satisfactorily that question which the first Christians had, and we have them reenforced by ages of history and vast volumes of Christian experience.

Christ is Reigning in Heaven

Like the disciples of old, we first think of Christ as in the celestial world, and turning to the Scriptures for a response to our inquiry, we find it plainly written that he is reigning in heaven. He made declaration to this effect when he quoted Psalm 110, and applied the passage to himself,

> "The Lord said unto my Lord,
> Sit thou on my right hand,
> Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet."[10]

This statement so impressed Peter's mind that on the day of Pentecost he quoted it, and explained the descent of the Holy Spirit on the

[10] Matthew 22. 44.

ground that Christ from his throne was manifesting his power. "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear."[11] In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have the same idea expressed concerning Christ: "Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."[12] Jesus "is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."[13] He promises to share his regal power with his saints. "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne."[14] This inspiring conception of Christ reigning in heaven has been the inspiration of many of our noblest hymns. We express it devoutly in the prayers we offer. It has been the faith of the church through all the centuries.

But we feel that pictures of thrones and scepters are not to be taken literally. We

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[11] Acts 2. 33.
[12] Hebrews 1. 3.
[13] 1 Peter 3. 22.
[14] Revelation 3. 21.

Of course we should not think of a temple in heaven with Christ officiating as the priest after the manner of the Jewish priests of the old dispensation, just as we cannot properly think of a literal throne on which our Lord is sitting wielding a scepter of authority. But, by his very presence and character, Christ is representing us in heaven. John has a different figure for the same great idea. He thinks of a pleader or an attorney, and says: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."[17] We are not to think of a courtroom with a judge on the bench and Christ pleading before him in the style of the modern hall of justice. But Christ in his own person, by his very presence in heaven, and through his character as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of mankind, is in a sublime reality interceding for men. There is an oft-quoted story of classic literature concerning Æschylus, who was condemned to die by the Athenians. At the moment of his sentence by the judges his brother, Amyntas, came in. He had been brave in the service of his

[17] 1 John 2. 1, 2.

country. He simply lifted the stump of an arm, from which the hand had been severed in battle, and said not a word. But the judges were so impressed by this mute but powerful appeal that they immediately pardoned Æschylus. So our Lord's presence in heaven is a guarantee of our salvation, because his sacrificial life and death eternally carry divine compassion to the children of men. An old hymn graphically expresses this profound truth:

Five bleeding wounds he bears,
  Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
  They strongly plead for me:
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die."

Christ is Preparing Homes in Heaven

We also learn from the Scriptures that Christ is in heaven preparing homes for those who love him. We cannot tell all that is involved in this remarkable statement. But Jesus plainly said to his disciples, and, therefore, to all who in future generations acknowledge his lordship: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that

where I am, *there* ye may be also."[18] He is our forerunner. He makes heaven real to us by the fact that he has gone thither. If he had not ascended to the Majesty on high, we might live in doubt concerning that unseen world. Even his resurrection from the dead was not alone sufficient to confirm men in their hope of a future life. But when he passed into the heavens he made vivid and actual that invisible world. What he is doing there by way of preparation for those who love him may be merely a matter of speculation, and, as the Scriptures are silent on this question, our conjectures are but idle and unprofitable. But that he is indeed fitting up a place for us which will be glorious on many accounts, but chiefly because of his own presence there, we cannot doubt. In our deeper spiritual moods we feel that this heaven of which he is the chief glory is very near to us.

When the saintly Payson was nearing the end of his life he wrote to his sister: "I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been some weeks a happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in view. Its glories beam upon me; its breezes fan me; its odors are wafted to me; its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my

[18] John 14. 2, 3.

heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but an insignificant rill that may be crossed at a single step. The Sun of Righteousness has been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as he approached, and now he fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float like an insect in the beams of the sun, exulting, yet almost trembling, while I gaze upon this excessive brightness, and wondering with unutterable wonder why God should design thus to shine upon a sinful worm."

What Christ is doing in heaven is only a part of his activity. He is also present on the earth. He is busy in both the visible and the invisible world. Just as he was leaving his disciples, he said to them: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."[19]

These are very wonderful words, on which Christian faith has hung with confidence for

[19] Matthew 28. 18–20.

these many centuries. Now, if Christ is here on the earth in any real sense, we ought to know it. The evidences should be found in what he is doing. It is exceedingly comforting to find that proofs of his presence abound on every hand.

Christ is in His Own World

He is in current life, as he has been in the history of the past. Jean Paul Richter spoke for us all when he affirmed that "the life of Christ concerns him who, being the holiest among the mighty, and the mightiest among the holy, lifted with his pierced hands empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages."

It is curious that men of the world who have made no great claim to piety should realize this miracle of Christ's presence even more clearly than many who are sincere worshipers of our Lord. Ernest Renan refers to Jesus as "this sublime person, who each day still presides over the destinies of the world," and addresses to him this apostrophe: "A thousand times more alive, a thousand times more beloved, since thy death than during thy passage here below, thou shalt become the cornerstone of humanity so entirely, that to tear thy

name from this world would be to rend it to its foundations."

Napoleon Bonaparte on Saint Helena expressed a like conviction: "Can you conceive of Cæsar as the eternal emperor of the Roman Senate, and from the depth of his mausoleum governing the empire, watching over the destinies of Rome? Such is the history of the invasion and conquest of the world by Christianity; such is the power of the God of the Christian; and such is the perpetual miracle of this progress of the faith and of the government of his church."

Every Christian should be able to realize this by an act of personal faith in the Son of God, with whom it is his privilege to have constant spiritual fellowship. He should be conscious of it in the sacraments and observances of the church, particularly in the holy communion, in which Christ has promised to manifest himself to all who partake of his body and blood in the mystical sense. They should see this truth in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter whom Christ promised to send, and who, according to his word, should represent him. "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you."[20] We must not forget that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Chris-

[20] John 14. 18.

tians ought also to be sensible of Christ's presence in the world through his activity in the church, which is called his body. The providential history of Christianity should convince every reader of the inspiring record that our Lord is exercising oversight of all his people.

In Scottish story there is a tale of MacGregor, a Highland chieftain who fell wounded by two balls. His clan wavered and would have been swept away by the enemy, but when the stricken leader noticed this he raised himself upon his elbow with all his remaining strength, and while the blood was gushing from his wounds he cried: "I am not dead, my children. I am looking to see you do your duty." The drooping courage of his men was aroused, they once more resisted the onslaught of their foes and prevailed against them. The Christian ought to be able to hear a voice like this from his Master, and be sustained by the certainty that his Lord is beholding his every act. John pictures him in the Apocalypse as saying, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."[21]

Christ is Seeking the Lost

He is here seeking to save men by his tender approach to their souls. Two vivid scenes

[21] Revelation 1. 18.

present themselves to our imagination. The first is laid in Eden amid the most entrancing environment. It is an earthly paradise, with a heavenly atmosphere. In this habitation dwell those created in the image of God who are to be the progenitors of the human race. About them reigns a golden era of peace, and in their hearts are innocency and happiness. But as we look a somber change occurs. Sin enters the fair abode, and with it the grim specter of death. Life is tainted, and beauty begins to decay. Darkness settles over the earth. But in the gloom a footstep is heard, and God, who is treading the leafy path, sends out his voice upon the awful silence, bringing terror to hearts filled with a sense of guilt, though his accents are tender and gracious as he says, "Where art thou, O man, where art thou?"[22] Drawn from their covert whither they have retired to hide themselves from the voice of the Lord, they are hurried out of paradise into a world of sorrow and struggle.

Over against this scene place another. It is laid, not in a luxurious paradise, but in a world of disorder and confusion. Rank error grows everywhere. Fields of blood stretch here and there. The earth is a wilderness and darkness covers its face. But as we look a

[22] See Genesis 3. 9.

bright form emerges from the gloom. Wherever he goes a flood of glory follows. It is the incarnate Son of God treading the stony paths of earth. Sin-stricken men lift up their weary hearts to hear his tender voice as it steals out over the dark waste and says, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."[23] It is Christ walking through the centuries, seeking the fallen, crying in anguish of spirit to all wanderers, "Where art thou, O man, where art thou?"

This is the office that Jesus is steadily performing upon the earth, and it is incredible that any who believe in his power to save and in his everlasting compassion for the sinner should doubt that he is among men, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."[24]

Christ Is Saving Life

He is here to transform character. We know how he bound himself to this task when he was among us in the flesh. This is his work now as then, and the marvels which he is performing surpass any other wonders which have astonished the world. He is taking the broken and dirt-covered fragments of humanity which he can pick up anywhere, and he is

[23] Luke 19. 10.

[24] Matthew 20. 28.

rearing a temple, whose spires and pinnacles shall pierce the sky, whose magnificence shall command the admiration of the universe, and whose aisles and vaulted ceilings shall resound with the sublimest music ever produced on earth or in heaven. He enters the haunt of vice and calls into eternal life the desperate drunkard. He invades the purlieus of the city, and wins to purity the shameless harlot. These are but types of his manifold power to transfigure human life. The records of modern work for the perishing abound in exhibitions of his saving grace. Thus his presence will be forever proved until the world shall be brought to his feet, not by the compulsion of force, but by the irresistible might of love.

He reigns in heaven and on the earth.

He intercedes in heaven and with men on the earth.

He prepares homes for men in heaven above.

He makes heaven for them on the earth beneath.

His power astonishes. His wisdom amazes. His loves conquers. To him we yield our lives.[25]

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[25] "The church has been led to regard herself as the widow and not the bride of Christ. . . . What is needed in order to awaken a worthier activity in the church is a faith that discerns him as actually here in his Kingdom." W. N. Clarke.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT SHALL WE DO TILL CHRIST'S RETURN?

A FEW years ago a strange thing happened to a lake fifty miles long and ten miles wide in the heart of Mexico. One morning the people living in a little settlement on the shore were alarmed to see an immense whirlpool far out upon the surface of the water. It was accompanied by a dull rumbling noise. Many sailing boats were upon the lake at the time, and a large number of them were sucked down by the maelstrom. The struggles of the persons overtaken by this calamity were terrible to behold, but nothing could be done in their behalf. In twenty minutes all was over. The explanation of this calamity was indicated by the fact that after the disturbance had passed the surface of the lake had subsided several feet, and streams of petroleum were noticed running along the edge of the shore, thus leading to the opinion that the bottom of the lake had suddenly sunk, causing the destructive whirlpool.

It is customary to make such events illustrate the suddenness and unexpectedness with

which death may come to anyone. Nothing is plainer to the mind of the observer than the certainty that life on earth will some day cease for each inhabitant, and the uncertainty of the time when this end will be reached. These facts are analogous to the certainty that the Son of man will return and the uncertainty of the time at which he will come back. The illustrations which Jesus used to impress these facts are most striking. Some persons insist on applying those parables to the event of death. They can be so used, but to make this their exclusive meaning is to tear them violently from their connection.

In spite of the fact that Christ said the day and the hour of his return were not known even to himself,[1] and that he warned his disciples to be ready, "for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh,"[2] some of his words are used to prove that it is possible to fix approximately the time of his return. This is done under the influence of certain statements of our Lord concerning tokens which might be relied upon to signify the approach of his second advent. Yet he qualified these declarations to such an extent that he evidently wished them to be used with great care, and even warned his apostles against the

[1] Matthew 24. 36. [2] Matthew 24. 44.

danger of being mistaken.[3] Though he emphasized the necessity of being constantly prepared for his return, he repeatedly said that the time of his coming again was indefinite. Yet he exhorts them to watch, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."[4]

Why does Jesus make this exhortation so strong? First, that he may keep alive this expectation of his return entirely apart from the time when it is to occur. He wishes his disciples never to have absent from their thought the fact that he is coming back. This event must be in the forefront of all their activities. They must remember that judgment is to be pronounced; that this life has to do with the next; that accounts will inevitably be made up. But does not the uncertainty of the time of Christ's return empty his words of the force which otherwise they would possess? This cannot be the case if we remember all his recorded reasons for urging watchfulness. It is an important thing to keep our Lord's coming before our minds, and the very uncertainty of the time of his coming serves to emphasize the certainty of the event. The supreme emphasis is on the coming to judgment, and not on the time of the event. "Watch," for it is a crisis which all must some time meet.

[3] Matthew 24. 4, 23. [4] Mark 13. 37.

The Command to Watch

There is no illusion about this. Jesus is not striving to excite men to watchfulness under false pretenses. He is the most candid teacher the world has known. He says in his apocalyptic discourse, "When ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, *even* at the doors."[5] The apostle James has repeated this caution. He says, "The judge standeth before the doors."[6] This is a fact of perpetual experience. All through the centuries Christ has been standing at the door. In the fullness of time he will turn the knob, lift the latch, and come in to final judgment. No one knows when this will occur, but the signs before the siege of Jerusalem are types of the signs before his second advent. Yet Jesus repeatedly said, "Let no man deceive you." In other words, he would have them be cautious about the signs, and remember the things that are to come to pass before his return. How long after these signs have appeared he will come no one knows. It is enough to say that these things must occur first. After that, not immediately, will come the end. But, meanwhile, the church must watch and pray, because the Judge standeth at the door.

But millions have died in the constant

[5] Matthew 24. 33; see also Mark 13. 29. [6] James 5. 9.

expectation of his coming, and he has not returned. Certainly, and millions more will die before he comes in the historic sense in which we are now using that phrase. But the Judge is always standing at the door. When death thrusts us out of that door he is there to meet us. If we have a conscious spiritual fellowship with him, that meeting will be one of exceeding great joy. Thenceforth, under better conditions, the fellowship we have been enjoying will be continued forever. If, as we pass out of the door, we are conscious of a spiritual separation from him, that meeting will be an unhappy one, for it will mean a continuance of that separation. The final judgment will yet awake the world. When He who is standing at the door does come to the world, those who were in conscious fellowship with him will be raised to glorious and unbroken life with him and with the holy of all the ages. But those who were evil and knew themselves to be separated from him will be raised to condemnation and continued separation from him. For he said, "All that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."[7] Now the state of each

[7] John 5. 28, 29.

of these classes was fixed at death. The good never become bad from the time they close their eyes in death until the hour of their resurrection, and the bad never become good during that interval. If ten thousand years are yet to be rolled away before Christ returns to final judgment, the condition of men at the time of their death will not be altered in the slightest degree when the Lord comes to separate the faithful from the faithless. They will all receive judgment of life or death according to their spiritual condition at the moment of their decease. In this sense it is appropriate to say that the Son of man comes to everyone when his earthly probation is ended, but this does not exclude the final judgment. Christ is coming in due time to bring to a termination the age during which his gospel has been preached.

Time Only One Element in Watching

The command to watch has a variety of meanings. There can be no doubt that the time idea is pushed to the front with such a purpose as we have sought to outline. This can be the only meaning of the parable of the householder and the thief. "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master

of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh."[8]

It is possible to make too much of the point made in this parable, as though it were the only element in Christ's exhortation to watchfulness. We cannot escape the feeling that this is sometimes done by evangelists who make dramatic use of this exhortation when appealing to impenitent sinners. The uncertainty of life is a fact with which people are so fully acquainted that it has lost its impressiveness. The evangelist finds that to bear down upon the certainty of Christ's return and the uncertainty of the moment when he may come is to produce an alarm in the spirits of some which the mere uncertainty of life cannot awaken. The second advent of Christ is a concrete thing which excites the imagination of the hearer; but if the latter is a reflecting person, he will know that there is something more striking and impressive than this. It is the fact that the omniscient Christ is always present and forever observing his life. The Scriptures go much farther than do the evangelists. They

[8] Matthew 24. 42–44.

do not depend on the second coming of Christ as the sharpest incentive to penitence. They make it plain that he who delays to make his peace with God because he thinks Christ might not come in the next hour or the next year, is pursuing a foolish and suicidal policy. Gambling on the chances of Christ's return is exceedingly dangerous, since in a spiritual sense Christ is already here. He sees the guilty soul of the sinner. He is his present judge. His breath is on the sinner's cheek. His hand is on his pulse. The sinner has not the guarantee of an hour. If he ceases to breathe at any minute, there is absolutely an end of his opportunity for salvation. If Christ comes to-morrow, or a thousand years from now, the result will be the same. The situation cannot be changed. There is no safe moment but now.

Christ is Also Watching

It is this spiritual presence of Christ that needs greater emphasis in our day, and it is important that the ground of the righteous life should be more solid than the mere dread lest Christ may come back to find the sinner in a hopeless state. It has been said by an evangelist who makes much of the speedy return of Christ as a motive for repentance and faith,

"Knowing that the bank examiner may drop in at any moment keeps many a cashier from being dishonest." That is not true. Honesty does not consist in merely refraining from dishonest acts, but in having a spirit which would scorn dishonesty. If the cashier is only outwardly honest, because he fears the sudden appearance of the bank examiner, he may really be a thief at heart.

The fact of Christ's spiritual presence must also be emphasized in the thought of the true believer. In many of the parables used by our Lord to illustrate the suddenness and unexpectedness of his return he speaks of the possibility of long delay, as has been shown in preceding pages. Christians must remember that, however tardy his return may seem to be, he is constantly in his own world doing his own work among the children of men. This fact we have emphasized in a former chapter. What is of great importance is that those who believe and love our Lord should not become weary because he does not visibly manifest himself to them. The impatience of the Christian is in some respects as evil as the recklessness of the sinner. It is well for us to remember other words of Christ, as well as those which specifically refer to his second coming. He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto

the end of the world."[9] He comforted his disciples with the promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[10] Yet some Christians speak as though they thought of Christ as afar off, almost out of reach: they must wait for him to return in order to obtain help of him in their struggle to overcome the world. Bishop Taylor said, "I know Jesus Christ better than I know anyone else in the world." He felt that he could have perpetual comradeship with him. It is a species of infidelity to doubt this possibility. It shows a deplorable lack of faith. It is virtually to deny that the church has had Christ's personal direction through the centuries. It is to affirm that in all the time yet to come before his visible return the church will be without his guidance. It is to assert that Christ cannot be victorious by the exercise of his spiritual presence and power. It is to say that he is helpless and hopeless in the contest for this world until he comes back to the earth in a body which can be seen and handled. It is putting an abridgment to the omnipotence of Christ such as one would think no true believer in his deity would for a moment entertain. Let it not be forgotten how slowly and method-

[9] Matthew 28. 20.

[10] Matthew 18. 20.

ically God works in the processes of the physical world, and this impatience about the return of Christ will seem childish. "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand."[11]

Watchfulness and Personal Religion

Making all allowance for the urgency of perpetual watchfulness, lest the Lord come upon us when we are unaware, it must be apparent from the considerations just set forth that many persons have placed the emphasis of our Lord's admonitions on the wrong thing. Time has occupied the whole thought of many, whereas conduct is the real matter upon which our Lord laid the most stress. The question is not, When will our Lord return? but How shall I behave until he does return? Conduct, and not time, is the pivot upon which all Christ's exhortations turned.

By comparison of our Lord's words with the exhortations of his apostles we learn that watchfulness means not merely fixing one's

[11] James 5. 7, 8.

eye upon the possibility of Christ's return at any time, but also, and more specifically, attending to one's personal, spiritual condition. In the parable of the virgins,[12] we have an illustration of the necessity of keeping the heart with all diligence and seeing that by prayer and watchfulness the inward grace of a holy life is maintained. We are not to let the oil of grace become exhausted. We are not to permit our spiritual emotions to die. We must obey the command of Christ, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third, and find *them* so, blessed are those *servants*."[13]

This implies perfect faith in Christ, who must be trusted and loved precisely as though he were in bodily presence among us. "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly

[12] Matthew 25. 1–13. [13] Luke 12. 35–38.

with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith *even* the salvation of *your* souls."[14]

This cultivation of the inner life must not be left to private devotion alone. We are urged to "watch and pray."[15] But this must include public worship. "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting *one another;* and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh."[16]

All this will induce in the true Christian sobriety of conduct, and seriousness of attention to the details of a Christian character. Our Lord gave very clear intimation of this. "But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; for *so* shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[17] One of the men who heard Christ's apocalyptic discourse carried out this exhortation as follows: "Wherefore girding up the loins of your

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[14] 1 Peter 1. 8, 9.
[15] Mark 13. 33.
[16] Hebrews 10. 25.
[17] Luke 21. 34–36.

mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."[18] "But inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy."[19]

We can see from these considerations a deep significance in the exhortations of the Apocalypse. "Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come."[20] "Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep *it,* and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."[21] "I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown."[22] "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."[23] In these and many other similar injunctions by Christ and his apostles we perceive that watchfulness, in view of our Lord's second coming, bears upon the personal spiritual life

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[18] 1 Peter 1. 13.
[19] 1 Peter 4. 13.
[20] Revelation 2. 25.
[21] Revelation 3. 2, 3.
[22] Revelation 3. 11.
[23] Revelation 16. 15.

of the believer who is looking for his Saviour's return. He is not only to watch for his Lord, but to watch himself, lest he be found wanting in the grace of a godly life even while he is talking of his Master's coming, and feeding his imagination on the bright hope of his appearing.

Watch Your Business

But watchfulness also means fidelity to trust, first among those who are charged with high responsibilities, such as the apostles. To this effect speaks one of the parables given by our Lord in his apocalyptic discourse. "*It is* as *when* a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch. Watch therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."[24] With the same intention is the parable of the faithful and faithless headservant. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is

[24] Mark 13. 34–37.

that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath."[25] The apostle Peter has taken up this idea in the following passage: "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to *the will of* God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away."[26]

The penalty which will fall upon the unfaithful servant is appalling. "But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the

[25] Matthew 24. 45–47.

[26] 1 Peter 5. 1–4.

gnashing of teeth."[27] It is a tragic fact of history that unfaithful shepherds of the flock of Christ have been guilty of the very neglect which is pictured in this parable. This was the case in those dark centuries when the Roman priesthood forsook their spiritual obligations and allowed the people to starve for the bread of life. A similar neglect of sacred duty was instanced in the conditions which made necessary the great evangelical revival in England during the eighteenth century.

The longer "my lord tarrieth" the greater is the temptation to fall into this sin. Hence the necessity of keeping in mind that, while Christ did not say he was coming back very soon, he did reiterate beyond the possibility of anyone misunderstanding him that he is coming back some time, and he did make it plain that until he does come back in the historic sense he will continue his spiritual presence in the world and be very observant of the conduct of his servants.

Work While You Watch

The same fidelity to trust is enforced upon all Christ's disciples as an imperative obligation. In the parable of the talents[28] we have

[27] Matthew 24. 48–51.

[28] Matthew 25. 14–30.

this lesson taught in unmistakable terms. It is said that after a long time the master returned to see what his stewards had done with their opportunities and to confer everlasting benefits upon those who had been faithful, and to administer punishment to those who had been neglectful. It is sometimes possible for people to fasten their minds on the fact of Christ's second coming in such a way as to exclude from their thought the necessity of faithfulness in the performance of their duties while they are upon the earth. This is an evil which befell the Thessalonians. They had become so convinced that Christ would come back quickly that they fell into easy and unconcerned idleness, and this resulted in their dropping into evil ways, so that Paul was compelled to write them very sharply, saying, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you. If any will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing."[29] Those lax and irritating persons have their successors in our day. Many

[29] 2 Thessalonians 3. 10–13.

good persons who are looking for the early return of our Lord keep this injunction, but there are others who neglect it. The temptation to do this is very subtle. Against it we should seek to guard ourselves with great care. The meaning of Christ's teaching is that while we wait we must work.

The parable of the talents is centered on the truth that every man has some ability, and that each will be judged according to the use which he has made of this stock in trade. There is such a thing as taking one's responsibility too lightly. This was the case with the unwise virgins in Christ's great parable. They are not to be thought of as evil people who were shut out because their characters were bad, but as people who did not realize the importance of everlastingly keeping themselves in readiness. They took their functions at too low a valuation. There is danger that by fixing his thought upon the glorious fact of Christ's return, and by assuming that it may come during his lifetime, the Christian may think there is no urgent need to work against the evils which are about him in the world, and thus fail to keep the real spirit of Christ's exhortation to be watchful. We have those among us who say that the church has nothing to do with reforms in society. Its

only business is to preach the gospel, exhibit holy and unspotted lives, and thus bear witness to the grace of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. They announce that to work for the destruction of the liquor traffic, the suppression of the social evil, the removal of political corruption, the cleansing of the slums, the improvement of the industrial situation, or any other philanthropic undertaking, is but a waste of time and energy, and an interference with the supreme duty of the church. They say the iniquities which vex society can never be cured till Christ returns to do this in person, and ask why Christians should dabble unprofitably with these matters in view of the fact that Christ will soon come back and summarily dispose of everything hostile to his kingdom. The parable of the talents should be a sufficient corrective for such folly, if there were no other.

Watch With Your Lord

As our Lord knelt in the garden of Gethsemane he was stricken with the sense of loneliness because his disciples could not enter into the shadow of his trial. On rising from his knees to rejoin them he discovered they were asleep, and gently rebuked them in words addressed to Peter: "Could ye not watch with

me one hour?"[30] One can imagine him now observing the sluggish way in which many Christians await his return, and asking with pathetic solicitude the same question. He has a mighty task on his hands. It is such a burden as only the Son of God can bear. He calls for the sympathetic fellowship of his church. He says to all ease-taking waiters, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Watchfulness does not only mean waiting for him to come back, but also engaging in the work on which his heart is set.

On the other hand, it is possible to think of our service as too hard. The man who had but one talent gave up his task of making it develop into something worth while and hid it away in the earth. So people who are looking for the return of our Lord may consider their abilities as so small that nothing can be added to the influence of the gospel by their activity. These are to remember that Christ wants them also to watch with him during this little hour, and to carry forward to the utmost of their ability the task which he has committed to them. Until Christ comes back we are to watch if there is any loyalty in us. That is so clearly put, in such a variety of words, that we cannot doubt it. But we are to watch not

[30] Matthew 26. 40.

as men who are looking for the coming of the morning, but as persons upon whom the day has already dawned, in which they are to put off the slumber of the night and put on the energy of the day. Our Lord said: "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."[31] The day is here. It is not to be filled with dawdling and dreaming, but with daring and doing.

[31] John 9. 4.

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[31] John 9. 4.

CHAPTER VIII

IS THE WORLD GROWING BETTER?

We are told that it makes no difference what we may think is the correct answer to this question; that the whole matter is determined by what the Bible says about it. We admit that we ought to search the Scriptures for light on this subject; but we also offer a gentle protest against the suggestion that human reason, which is a gift of God, cannot safely be used in the effort to ascertain from observation and experience the facts of life which bear on the question.

It would seem perfectly clear that we do not need to go to the Bible, which was finished many centuries ago, to learn what is the condition of society to-day, and that if we should do this, nothing would be added to our knowledge. We may find in the Scriptures much, on the other hand, to enlighten us on the social, political, moral, and spiritual conditions which prevailed in ancient times. So shall we likewise find in many other books of history valuable aids to an understanding of the world's state in earlier epochs. By comparing the con-

ditions of our times with those existing one century or ten centuries ago, we should be able to declare whether the character of society at present is better or worse than at some previous period, just as we can tell by consulting our memories or the weather records whether the physical conditions surrounding us to-day are more comfortable or less agreeable than those of ten days ago. In the same way it is within our ability to determine whether the moral conditions in the United States or Europe, Asia and Africa are improving or declining.

Facts Must Fit the Bible

The only necessity is that, first, we shall be acquainted with enough of the world to be able to base our conclusions on adequate information, and, second, that we shall have sufficient judgment or common sense to form a correct opinion from the facts brought to our attention. It is just here that those who say we must consult the Bible to find out the truth respecting the moral and spiritual conditions of the world point the finger of condemnation at us, and say that we cannot have intelligence enough to know the world, and even if we had the widest possible acquaintance with the populations of the earth, we should still be incom-

petent to determine whether they were better or worse than their ancestors. Only God is wise enough to understand the exact situation, and he has given to men through inspired writings the final test by which they may know whether the world is advancing or retrograding.

This position would be troublesome if it were not true that the actual facts in God's world must correspond with the actual statements in God's word with regard to the world. Surely, mere human conjectures or denials will not amount to anything. Facts are facts, and they must be harmonized with themselves, and not with the notions of men respecting them. When we have the facts we should adhere to them, no matter how far they take us. We feel certain that Jesus and his apostles did not say anything contrary to the facts in their day, and that they did not proclaim anything with regard to the future which will contradict the facts as they successively occur in the history of mankind. It is affirmed by some that Christ and his apostles said the world was very evil, and that it would get worse instead of better. No one denies that Christ and his apostles said that the world in their day was very evil. It did not require any inspiration to make that declaration. Everybody could

see that it was a fact. It may be said with equal accuracy that the world of our day is very evil, and it requires no divine revelation to make that fact clear to the intelligence of everyone. But Christ and his apostles did not say that the world would get worse and worse until it became so thoroughly steeped in sin that there would be nothing left but to wreck it and begin over again. The truth is they said something quite different, and the facts of history and current life are in entire agreement with them. These assertions we shall now prove.

The Last of the Apostles First

Let us inquire what the New Testament says with regard to the future of this world, and then put alongside of these declarations the facts of human development as they are plainly exposed to our view. The apostles may properly be considered first, because historically speaking they are nearer to us in point of time than is Jesus. They did not begin to write until Christ had gone from the earth about thirty years, and they continued to write until at least fifty years had passed; so that in these New Testament writers we have testimony which covers a half century beyond the time when Jesus made his procla-

mations. We are thus provided with the means of gauging the drift of Christian feeling and how far it agreed with what our Lord had previously said.

The latest of these writers was the apostle John, who said, "Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour."[1] The phrases "the last hour," "the last days," "the last time," as used by John and other New Testament writers, refer to the end of the age, which they evidently believed to be very near, and at which they expected the return of Christ. John apparently thought this event would occur during his lifetime. "The last hour" is the close of the gospel dispensation, which began with the establishment of the Christian Church, and will end with Christ's final appearance to judge the world. "The last days" are bounded by a constantly widening horizon, but they lie within the range of the writer's vision. When John used the phrase he meant the short period which he believed still remained before the manifesting of Christ at the last day. We feel ourselves to be in the last times, as compared with the early ages which have fled away, but when we

[1] 1 John 2. 18.

think of the progress which Christ's kingdom has yet to make we sometimes feel that we are in the first times. It is to be observed that John saw many antichrists in his day, and that he felt their presence indicated that the age was swiftly coming to an end. Those who see in our day a similar number of antichrists should exercise restraint in proclaiming on this ground the speedy termination of this dispensation, remembering how many centuries have fled away since John wrote.

The World as John Saw It

The conditions which the apostles saw around them, together with their expectation that Christ would very soon return, colored their language whenever they spoke of the age in which they were living, and must always be taken into account in attempting to explain what they meant when they described the trend of the future, as it appeared to them. John wrote a sentence which is the main reliance of those who insist that the world is growing worse: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one."[2] This is interpreted to mean that, since human society as a whole is within the embrace of the devil, it

[2] 1 John 5. 19.

is quite irrational to suppose that it can ever be improved.

Much unprofitable argument of this sort would be prevented by remembering that the word "world" has four different meanings in the New Testament, and that wherever it is used the context will tell the earnest student of the Bible which is intended. (1) The world means the universe, the order of nature, the created world. It is in this sense used by Christ in his great high-priestly prayer when he says, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"[3] (2) The earth, the space inhabited by men. This is the sense in which Jesus used it when he said, "And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee."[4] (3) The world of humanity, mankind universally. It is in this sense the word is used when John says, "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."[5] (4) The world of mankind as alienated from God, the unspiritual world which

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[3] John 17. 24; see also Matthew 25. 34.

[4] John 17. 11.

[5] 1 John 2. 2.

gets its inspiration from the devil and not from God. It is this world to which John refers when he says: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."[6] This is the world that "lieth in the evil one." This is the world which is to be overcome, since it is always seeking to invade the believer's soul. "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"[7] But the world of humanity is not to be overcome in any sense except that it is to be won to Christ. It is not to be hated and shunned, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."[8] Apart from these distinctions in the scriptural use of the word "world," we should know that the whole world that lieth in the evil one could not actually

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[6] 1 John 2. 15, 16.
[7] 1 John 5. 4, 5.
[8] John 3. 16.

mean the entire world of humanity. Otherwise it would include even those saints who hold that the world is growing worse.

But even that world of mankind alienated from God is the object of attack by the servants of Christ, with a view to winning to truth and righteousness as many of its inhabitants as possible. Either it is hoped that some success will attend this endeavor, or the church is shut up to a doctrine of predestination akin to a bald fatalism, such as has been almost universally repudiated by Christians on grounds of both reason and revelation. To assume that the world of willful sinners is imprisoned in such a way that it cannot be affected for good by the preaching of the gospel is practically to destroy the great incentive for attempting to rescue the unsaved populations of the earth.

Peter and Paul

It is not necessary to single out every text in the apostolic writings which by clever exegesis may be shown to bear on the belief of the first Christians regarding the character of their age and their expectations for the future. The judgment of the three leading apostles, as expressed in familiar passages, accurately represents the feeling of the primitive church as

a whole. Those who hold the criticisms which the apostles passed on their own times as predictions of the long future put much stress on the following: "Knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[9] Here again we have mention of "the last days," and once more must remember the limitations of the phrase. Of course, there were scoffers in Peter's day who were saying, "Where are the signs of his coming?" And there are scoffers in our day who are making the same taunt, and there will be scoffers in the last day who doubtless will be hurling this irritating question. But this declaration of itself does not by any means indicate that the world as a whole will be scoffers, much less that the Christian Church will contain an immense body of nominal adherents who will be thrusting forward this insolent inquiry. It is a mere delirium of the imagination to assume that what is here designated as a special class will be, in fact, the majority of those who live in the world, or even an immense number, much less that these will be enrolled in the

[9] 2 Peter 3. 3, 4.

Church of Christ. Most Christian people in our day believe that Christ will come again, and as the church increases in magnitude this conviction will spread far and wide.

It is of the utmost interest to see what Paul says upon this matter; and, indeed, he says more than any other apostle. In 2 Corinthians, 4. 4, he declares that "the god of this world has blinded the minds" of those who do not believe, so that the gospel cannot penetrate their hearts. This is taken by some persons to mean that not only was the world incorrigible in Paul's day, but that it will continue to be so to the end, because it is absolutely incapable of perceiving the truth. This is another illustration of the fallacy so common among people of this type who make a general statement apply specifically to a theory which they have formed. It is plain to every man who reads without a preconception that what Paul has said is simply that if we have difficulty in explaining why the gospel is not successful with certain people, we may know the reason to be that they have become blinded by worldliness.

Iniquities of the Times

Three passages from Paul's letters to Timothy require scrutiny in this connection, since

they are used by many to buttress their theory that the world is inevitably growing worse. "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons."[10] It is a queer temper which leads a man who reads the Bible honestly to take this passage as though it said that in the later days a majority of people would be of this sort, whereas all that Paul predicts is that *some* shall depart from the faith, which certainly does not indicate that a preponderant number, or even *many,* will do this. People have been guilty of such apostasies from the days of Christ until now, and it is presumed that such departures from the truth will occur through all the following centuries. But it is a manifest abuse of this passage to say that it indicates that the world will steadily grow worse and the church increasingly feeble.

"But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God;

[10] 1 Timothy 4. 1.

holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof; from these also turn away."[11] Here we have again the phrase "in the last days," and must remember its limitations. The brief period in the apostle's mind has now run nineteen centuries. Paul saw the grievous conditions of his own day, and he predicted that they would continue. No one would be stupid enough to deny the likelihood of this. The human heart does not change. Individuals will be wicked to the end, but that does not mean either that individuals will be more wicked then than now, or that they will be relatively greater in number than now. If the people who use such a passage to prove that the world is retrograding would, in their interpretations, confine themselves to what is written instead of thrusting into the word of God what has no place therein, they would command larger respect.

"But evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."[12] Certainly! they always have grown worse and worse, and they always will. It is of the very essence of evil that it should increase in any human heart where it is permitted to reside. If a man continues to be evil, he will always grow worse and not better. Sin

[11] 2 Timothy 3. 1–5.

[12] 2 Timothy 3. 13.

is forever progressing toward a climax. This is of its very nature. Evil men and seducers will never get better while they continue to be evil men and seducers. That is shown by experience every day, and we do not for a moment undertake to deny it or even to qualify it. But the passage does not say that the number of sinful men will increase relatively to the population of the world.

The Present and the Future

Paul's eye is upon his own age, which he expects will soon be terminated by the advent of Christ to judgment. He does not, in the passages just quoted, forecast the long future, in a section of which we are now living. Nevertheless, the evils he describes are recurrent in history. Again and again the picture he draws of his "last time" can be put down upon a place or a period and found exactly to fit it. This will ever be till the end comes. But it involves no proof that society will steadily deteriorate and the church grow feebler as the centuries melt away. There are strong reasons for believing that Paul took no such gloomy view of even the immediate future as some who quote him take of the present and the distant future. In illustration the following passage may be cited:

"For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written,

There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer;
He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:
And this is my covenant unto them,
When I shall take away their sins."[13]

The Number of the Elect

This is one of the most significant prophecies in the New Testament. The phrase, "the fullness of the Gentiles," recalls the words of our Lord in his apocalyptic discourse, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."[14] There time is the point of application, here it is the proportion of the Gentiles who are to be saved. The number is indefinite but preponderant. The apostle predicts the evangelization of the world outside of the Jewish nation before the conversion of the latter. Israel will be saved, but not until a vast majority of other people have been brought to Christ. Neither in the case of the Jews nor in that of the Gentiles does Paul say that everyone will be converted; but the words "fullness" and "all" certainly

[13] Romans 11. 25–27.

[14] Luke 21. 24.

point to an immense number of the elect, and hence to a comparatively small number of the reprobate.

Light is thus thrown upon another passage which is frequently misused to prove, first, that the only business of the church is to assemble the saints till the body of Christ is complete, and, second, that the elect saints will be but a handful in comparison with the lost. A church council is being held in Jerusalem over the question, To what extent ought Jewish ordinances to be binding on Christian converts? Peter tells his experience in preaching the gospel to Gentiles, and says that their conversion and receiving of the Holy Ghost satisfies him that God does not wish them to be loaded down with cumbersome and unprofitable ceremonies. Paul and Silas declare the miracles and wonders which they have witnessed among the Gentiles, and agree with the opinion of Peter. Then James says:

"Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

After these things I will return,
And I will build again the tabernacle of David,
which is fallen;

And I will build again the ruins thereof,
And I will set it up:
That the residue of men may seek after the Lord,
And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,
Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old."[15]

It is here simply affirmed that God proposes, in view of Israel's rejection of the gospel, to extend his proffer of salvation to the pagan world, thus more than compensating for the temporary blindness of the Jews. James supports this declaration by a citation from the prophet Amos. Instead of seeing in this passage evidence that a meager company of the elect is to be separated from humanity, we should see in it a proof that Christ contemplates the gathering of a vast "people for his name."

In fact, it would not be difficult to show from the writings of Paul that he counted on a perpetual growth of the Christian propaganda until it issued in triumph over the world. His indefatigable labors through the Roman empire prove that he felt it his business to capture the civilization of his day for Christ. History records that he so far suc-

[15] Acts 15. 13–18.

ceeded that in the generations immediately following the heathen gods were hurled from their altars, and the Christian gospel became the prevailing faith of the empire.

The Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition

Against any suggestion that Paul was hopeful of continuous progress for the kingdom of God, under the present order of things, some will urge the following remarkable passage: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for *it will not be,* except the falling away come first and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only *there is* one that restraineth now, until

he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; *even he,* whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."[16]

What does that passage mean? We might well wish that Paul had explained it to us. It would have saved the advocates of grotesque theories a great deal of brain weariness and prevented them from resorting to much artifice. It is evident that he had told the Thessalonians what enabled them to understand his words because he said, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"[17] He is simply reminding them of what he had previously said, the significance of which he believed was clear to them, though they had apparently overlooked it in their

[16] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1–12.

[17] 2 Thessalonians 2. 5.

eagerness to believe that Christ was almost immediately to return. Paul did not see fit to put down his explanation in writing. Evidently, the Holy Spirit did not inspire him to go on with an elaborate interpretation. It would look as though God did not care to make a complete revelation through Paul touching this matter. Perhaps it could not be appropriately committed to succeeding generations, since experience and history would finally be a perfect commentary on all prophecy. But the trouble with many theorists is that they cannot wait. They want to know immediately what this passage means, and since they have no sure revelation, they use their imaginations, and with remarkable agility. They find texts here and there which, like a child's building blocks, can be fitted into a structure that pleases them, though it may not be a fine piece of architecture. They look over history and find events which resemble items in this prophecy, and they are quite satisfied. But the next generation comes along and knocks over the pile just as a naughty boy might topple over the blocks of his brother, and then they begin all over again. So the man of sin in this passage has been applied to Nero, for the early Christians thought the picture exactly matched him. Later the idea gained credence

that it was the pope, and later the papacy as an institution. The Roman Communion retorted by applying it to Protestantism. Afterward the Christian world referred it to Napoleon Bonaparte, and there is no doubt that there are English, Belgians, French, Italians, and others who now think it is the German Kaiser. So the interpretation changes from age to age. The fact is that we do not know, though possibly some devout scholars may have made a close guess. It may require a good many thousands of years to fill out that picture and make it possible for future generations to understand what is involved in this apocalyptic passage. On the other hand, it may be that the thing so prophesied has been fulfilled, not completely and ultimately, but typically and partially. Perhaps the wretched times in the Middle Ages, when religion seemed to have become bankrupt, can be made to stand for the terrible evil herein predicted, though it may be but one in a series of such calamities. Perhaps every recurrence of frightful iniquity is in partial fulfillment, the present European war, for example, being in some of its aspects as hideous a piece of infernal wickedness as the world has ever known.

Remembering that the Jews in an earlier time had looked upon Antiochus Epiphanes as

the superlative personal manifestation of iniquity, and that Paul's mind was saturated with the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrews, both that of the Old Testament and that which was not admitted into the Bible; and remembering that prophetic language cannot be subjected to the same rhetorical laws which are necessarily applied to simpler and more precise forms of composition, we need not be concerned to make a close and accurate interpretation of this profoundly mysterious passage. Those who have attempted to do this, seeking to give each minute particular a precise and rigid meaning, have fallen into many foolish and unprofitable vagaries. The fundamental points in the prophecy are not hard to discern, and these are sufficient for all who are not carried away by a passion to solve puzzles or dispose of curiosities.

A Study in Proportions

That on the return of Christ evil will be exhibited in its most sinister forms, as is admitted elsewhere, is inevitable from the very nature of sin. Moreover, the contrast between the frightful apostasy of the few and the fidelity of the body of the earth's inhabitants who have been redeemed from wicked ways will be very startling. The dramatic elements of the comparison may lead

to the feeling that wickedness is more rampant than ever. It is also far from incredible that this iniquity of the minority will become in a sense incorporate, or federated under some unified leadership raising itself like a serpent to strike its fangs into its victim. It may follow the individual guidance of a conspicuous leader, the devil or one of his most capable representatives among men. It is natural that the final conflict between good and evil on this planet should be most terrible, that the assault of iniquity should be supremely venomous. But that does not necessarily mean that sinfulness will rally to its standards the majority of men then alive. Paul does not say anything of this sort in the passage under consideration. The worst men that ever cursed the earth will probably flourish when Christ comes back. But the best men and the most intelligent Christians ever known will also be alive at that time. The summits of both good and evil will tower aloft. That is in perfect harmony with the very constitution of things in this world of probation and discipline. What the power is which restrains the final outbreak of consummate iniquity until the time for it is ripe—whether the Holy Spirit, the church, the force of civilization, or what—we need not torture our

minds to ascertain. Is it not enough to know that it is held back, and that in due time, when "the lawless one" shall be revealed, the Lord Jesus shall slay him "with the breath of his mouth"?

There is nothing in the Scriptures which says that the whole world will be given over to the most virulent forms of iniquity, or that even a majority of the inhabitants of the globe will be characterized by such desperate sinfulness. Indeed, if we press the words of Jesus to the farthest point of literalness, we could not say that more than one half the population of the globe would be evil. "Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women *shall be* grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left."[18] Of course, the passage means nothing so mathematically exact as that. It signifies that, as society will be going on as usual, saints and sinners working together in their several occupations just as they do now, the coming of the Son of man will separate them regardless of the fellowship they may have on the earth. The fact that people are good will not prevent their being torn from their associates in business, saints being separated from sinners by an inevitable law of differentiation.

[18] Matthew 24. 40, 41.

What Did Jesus Think?

When we turn to consider the conditions at the end of the age, as they were intimated in our Lord's apocalyptic discourse, we are confronted by this picture: "And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[19] This is more elaborately given by Luke in an earlier part of his record, and there includes a reference to the destruction of Sodom.[20] This prediction has been used to prove that our Lord taught that the world would be at its worst when he returned, whereas it has only to do with the fact that when he comes again the course of the world will be going on as usual, and does not indicate the actual spiritual conditions of the age. Even the most conservative millenarians admit this. One of these writers, commenting on this passage and giving it practically the interpretation here set forth, says: "Some would press these words further than this and make them teach that

[19] Matthew 24. 37–39. [20] Luke 17. 26–30.

as the days of Noah and Lot were peculiarly wicked days, so will the days of our Lord's return be days of extraordinary wickedness, but this is pressing the words which our Lord speaks here beyond their evident intent. Our Lord meant what he explicitly says, that men will be engaged in their usual occupations, little thinking the Lord is near, and in a moment he will come."[21] In Christ's great parable of the final judgment[22] the fact that the Son of man will separate the sheep from the goats impresses the writer just quoted as indicating that the world at the time of Christ's coming will be far from a state of salvation. We do not maintain that the whole world will be actually converted to Christ before his return, but we do contend that there is nothing in this passage of itself which necessarily contradicts such an opinion.

It simply does not say anything to show what the condition of people will be at the time of Christ's return. It is said that all nations are to be brought before him. Certainly the multitudes who are dead are to be reckoned in the number, and we know that at that time the number of the dead will be incalculably larger than the number of those living at that mo-

[21] R. A. Torrey, The Return of the Lord Jesus, pp. 104, 105.
[22] Matthew 25. 31–46.

ment. There will have been sleeping in the dust the sheep and the goats to incomprehensible numbers to be judged in addition to all who are alive when he comes.

Parables of the Kingdom.

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, as he did almost constantly, he sometimes had in mind a spiritual kingdom which was already operating in the world, and at other times his thought was dwelling upon the future triumphant manifestation of that kingdom after he had returned to judge the world. This anyone can see by reading the passages in the New Testament which record Christ's words about the Kingdom. Sometimes he is thinking of the quiet, unobtrusive, gradual entrance and spread of that kingdom in the hearts of believers and organized society. At other times he is forecasting the visible and glorious victory of that kingdom over all the sovereignties of the world. Now and then these conceptions, which are often separately regarded, are so blended together in his speech that it is difficult to say with certainty which is predominant in his thought at the moment. Yet it is never impossible to see what it is he expects the Kingdom to do among men, or how he believes it will operate in society.

There are a few of his parables which one would think to be unmistakable. But when a theory is to be advanced or supported the distortions to which these are subjected are amazing. In the parable of the tares and the wheat[23] we have a simple illustration of the wisdom of not attempting violently to root out the evils which spring up in the same soil in which righteousness is growing, and of the propriety of waiting until the end of the world for such adjustments as will then inevitably be made. This does not satisfy those who are sure the world is becoming worse, however, and they call attention to the fact that weeds grow faster than wheat, and that, therefore, our Lord meant that, as time went on, the field, which is the world, will be overrun with tares, which will be vastly in excess of the wheat when Christ comes back. If this interpretation were carried out to its logical conclusion, it would mean that in time the wheat would be entirely choked to death.

Now, it is a principle of sound interpretation that the parables of Christ in each instance are intended to illustrate only one point, and that single object always stands out so prominently that anyone of ordinary intelligence cannot miss it. Incidentally, other

[23] Matthew 13. 24–30.

points will also be illustrated if one cares to make the application, but the parable is not spoken for more than one purpose, and, if it does not contain its own key to interpretation, the meaning of the parable can be easily gathered from the context. In this case it is so clear that the abuse of it is unpardonable. Jesus virtually says, "Do not tear up the weeds at this time in the growing field, because you will hurt the wheat." Now, this is precisely what certain extremists wish to do. They would like to define the elect and stand aloof from those whom they think outside the pale. Our Lord is saying to them, as he said to his apostles: "You think you know who the good and the bad are. You believe you can point out the saints and those who are not saints. Be not so sure. Wait until the end of the world. If you rip up the weeds you will destroy the wheat."

The Leaven in the Lump

Another illustration of what Jesus evidently thought about the kingdom he had come into the world to establish is to be found in the parable of the leaven.[24] The plain interpretation of this parable lies immediately on the surface. The kingdom of heaven is like the

[24] Matthew 13. 33; see also Luke 13. 20, 21.

leaven, the fermentative qualities of which enable it to penetrate the batch of dough until the whole substance has been impregnated with its energy. But this is not a satisfactory explanation for some, who say that leaven is always corruption. Yeast contains the principle of decay. Therefore the use of the figure here means the introduction of influences which adulterate even the doctrine of grace and ultimately poison the world. The mystery of iniquity works, and will work, until the whole church has been permeated by it.

Of course the foundation of this theory is that leaven elsewhere in the Bible is used to represent a corrupting agency, as the leaven of the Pharisees, to which our Lord referred as hypocrisy.[25] Of course no biblical scholar denies that in the great majority of cases the word "leaven" is employed to typify that which is corrupting and deteriorating; but when Christ says that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, we are sure he cannot mean that the kingdom is in process of decay. Once again let it be remembered that only one point in a parable is primarily intended to be illustrated. Here it is the energy of fermentation, and not the scientific explanation of fermentation, which is involved. The

[25] Luke 12. 1; see also 1 Corinthians 5. 7.

kingdom of heaven is like yeast in its power to extend its influence. It will pervade the whole body of society, and, if you were to carry Christ's figure out to its ultimate implication, it would mean that the kingdom of heaven will embrace the entire world of men and women if it be given time enough to accomplish its purpose.

The fact that a figure is used in one way almost exclusively is no reason for us to think that it may not be used in some other way. For example, one could speak of a rill at the top of a mountain, gathering power and volume from every little rivulet which flows into it as it proceeds down the mountainside, at length developing into a great stream, which finally becomes a broad river sweeping everything before it until it empties into the sea, as a type of the progressiveness of sin from small beginnings to great endings. We could say that no one can tell when he commences to do evil how vast the results will be. As life moves on, each day will add something to the volume of his iniquities until they become as great as the mighty river sweeping resistlessly to the ocean. On the other hand, the same figure could be employed to show the progressive development of a good life, which, beginning upon the mountain height in a little spring of

righteous endeavor and holy ambition, gathers strength as it goes, each new act of kindness contributing to its power, until at length it becomes a mighty river of beneficence, making the country through which it flows rich with flowers and fruits, and at last pouring its flood into the mighty ocean to sweeten and make wholesome the whole earth. So, while the leaven is ordinarily used to illustrate corrupting agencies, there is no restriction upon our Lord which compels him invariably to employ it in that way, and common sense shows that he did not so use it in this instance.

Other Misused Passages

When once the prejudice in behalf of a theory has been generated, there is no telling to what absurdities it will lead. For example, the parable of the mustard seed,[26] which so clearly uses the great productive principle of the earth, by which a great tree is evolved from the smallest of seeds, to typify the expansiveness of the kingdom of God, is mutilated by some theorists to mean "outward growth sheltering evil," the birds that lodge in the branches of the tree being figures of the iniquities which attach themselves even to the Christian Church. It would seem as though this

[26] Matthew 13. 31.

were so preposterous as only to require statement to carry its own refutation.

At the close of his parable of the unjust judge, our Lord asks: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"[27] The question is left unanswered by the Master. A similar silence would befit those who noisily proclaim that the rhetorical query of Jesus means that in this way he suggested there would be little or no faith among men when he should return. But the context shows that our Lord was in no such pessimistic mood when he uttered these words. He had been comparing the surrender to the widow's appeal which the unjust judge made under protest with the loving readiness of God to "avenge his elect, that cry to him day and night," saying that "he will avenge them speedily." Then he exclaims, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find" not "faith" in general, but "the faith," as the original text has it, "the faith" in particular which is denoted by the parable. The use of the definite article gives faith a specific application. It could be rendered "this faith," the faith which enabled the woman to persist in supplications for the redress of her grievance, the faith which will qualify men to con-

[27] Luke 18. 1–8.

tinue in prayer, when they are confronted by unhopeful conditions, the faith that believes God will make things right in due time. The Son of man, who "emptied himself" so that he could not tell when he would return, expresses no judgment in this instance concerning the probable situation when he should come again.

Jesus Never Despaired

We may say reverently that Jesus was the supreme optimist of his day. He never gave up any man but Judas Iscariot, who willfully tore himself away from the Master's fellowship. He never uttered a word which suggests that he did not expect to win his way. His aspirations and anticipations are easily gathered from the trend of his parables and the evident intention of his ministry. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself,"[28] does not sound like anything but a comprehensive triumph for the cross, a victory to be gained by the power of his sacrificial life and death over the consciences and affections of men, and not by some sudden overwhelming display of material force such as misguided persons in our time are so confidently but unwisely proclaiming.

[28] John 12. 32; see also: Hebrews 2. 9, 10; Romans 5. 18; 1 Timothy 2. 6; Matthew 20. 28; Mark 10. 45.

The Early Church and the Second Coming

It was very natural that the early Christians should be deeply impressed by the evil of the world about them, since they were undertaking to oppose the traditions of the ages among their own people, and also among the pagans to whom they soon carried their gospel, awakening the sternest antagonism wherever they went. The expectation of a speedy return of our Lord to the earth was a comfort to them, particularly when they felt that he probably would come back within their own lifetime and overpower their enemies and establish his kingdom on the earth. We have seen how they interpreted the words of Jesus to mean these things. But in addition to this it was difficult for them to realize that Christ could triumph in the world unless he appeared in bodily presence and put himself into the midst of the conflict at the head of his own forces. A victory over the Roman empire, under the authority of which they were being relentlessly persecuted, seemed impossible to them without this advent of our Lord. But when within three centuries Christianity did actually bring Constantine the emperor to his knees, and Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the feeling that Christ's

bodily presence was indispensable to his triumph gradually lost its hold upon their hearts and minds. Thus the expectation of the early return of our Lord grew dim, until at length it became the habit of theologians to explain the prophecies relating to the second advent in accordance with the progressive development of history.

The Modern Parallel

A similar process is going on in our day. Many devout persons are disturbed over the gigantic task of the Christian Church, which they feel to be an impossible performance without the immediate bodily presence of Christ as leader. They observe that after nineteen centuries of effort the result produced is apparently not commensurate with the effort expended. They note that there are only about four hundred millions of nominal Christians in a population of more than one billion five hundred millions. Worse than that is the fact that of those who are nominal Christians, comparatively a small number are aggressive and deeply spiritual. They argue that at the rate Christianity is spreading through the earth it will not prevail for a very long time, if, indeed, it ever succeeds in establishing itself universally in the world. They, therefore, become

impatient and disconsolate over the situation. Their trouble is increased by the prevalence of wickedness even among those nations which have a theoretically Christian civilization. They see that no people on the earth has actually adopted Christianity as its basal system, and no government is officially regulated by Christian teachings. Even England and America are far from being Christianized in any official sense. Noting these things, they throw up their hands over an apparently unequal struggle and declare that only by the early return of Christ in bodily form can the fight against unrighteousness be won. Hence they comfort themselves with those scriptures which seem to predict the speedy second advent of our Lord, and say: "We need not trouble ourselves. Christ is soon coming, and he will set everything right."

Tokens of Advance

On the other hand, there are very many Christians who do not take a gloomy view of the situation. They call attention to the fact that Christianity for many centuries was in process of developing the doctrines of our religion, compacting its energies and organizing its forces. In this process mistakes were made. Worldliness crept in, "Churchianity"

took the place of Christianity. It was necessary that the church should be cleansed by many washings from the corruption which had invaded it. The German Reformation, of which Luther was the chief figure and which spread all over Europe in the sixteenth century, represents one of these cleansings. The revival of the eighteenth century in England and America was another. Similar renewals of the Christian spirit will be demanded as the years move on, but it is very apparent that the Christian movement is a rising tide. The breakers dash upon the shore, and the sea recedes until the next surge of water is flung upon the strand. But the watchful observer knows that after each of these refluent movements the tide reaches a higher point and ultimately will be at the flood.

As so long a time was required for getting Christianity into the only business for which it was designed, it need not awaken any surprise that it is but little more than a hundred years since the missionary idea really took hold of the church. The progress made in the last fifty years is amazingly greater than in any five hundred years preceding. Even now we seem to be on the verge of the sublimest missionary operations the world has ever known. The church is more influential in the

life of nations to-day than ever. The conquest of the Roman empire to Christianity was a kind of formal acquiescence in a system of religion which was apparently destined to bring everything to its standards. Now the acceptance of Christianity is not official, but individual. Multitudes of people, regardless of surrounding conditions, are earnestly surrendering their lives to Christ. They are permeating the whole body of mankind with distinctively Christian influences.

Even this absurd, unnecessary and wicked war in Europe is bringing millions to their knees who hitherto have been rationalists and infidels. Meanwhile nations find it necessary to apologize for war and to propitiate the sentiment of the world. The belligerents on either side of the present conflict are attempting to set themselves right before mankind. They feel they must answer at the bar of international moral sentiment. There was no need to do anything of this sort in past ages. War was then the natural and inevitable thing. No one felt it necessary to put a nation's cause before the world until our Revolutionary forefathers in their Declaration of Independence said that a decent respect for the opinions of mankind impelled them to declare the reasons of their separation from Great Britain. Their

motive in doing this was undoubtedly to get their principles afloat in the thought of the world. Now the smallest war among civilized nations must be defended on alleged grounds of moral necessity.

If we ask what has changed the sentiment of the world toward international questions, we can instantly reply that it is the progressive influence of the Christian religion. It is simply one of those tokens in current life that Christ's parable of the leaven is being fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven is proceeding to impregnate all society with its nutritive power. Christ's kingdom is spreading over the world, as he said it would.

For the benefit of those who lugubriously proclaim the steady deterioration of the church, it seems necessary to emphasize the fact that the church as a whole was never more earnest and never more single in its devotion than at the present moment. John Wesley, who has been proudly but incorrectly claimed by the group of millenarians who say the world and the church are on the downward track, published a sermon entitled On Former Times, in which he plainly indicates that though he may have expected our Lord's return before the climax of Christian conquest, he could not be regarded as at all in favor

of the doleful program which extremists have mapped out for the time immediately preceding our Lord's second advent. He reviews the career of the Christian Church from the century in which he lived backward to the beginnings of Christianity, and shows conclusively that, deplorable as were the conditions in Great Britain when the Methodist revival broke out, the church was even then better than it had ever been before. He shows that the preceding century was inferior in vital godliness; that the sixteenth century, despite its great reformation movements, was characterized by an outbreak of injustice and cruelty, so that in the religious wars of that time not less than forty millions of persons were slaughtered within the compass of forty years; that in the thousand years immediately preceding the sixteenth century there was little evidence of anything but the most unwholesome conditions in the Christian Church. Stepping back to the age of Constantine, he affirms that the union of church and state in the Roman empire was most unfortunate for the cause of religion, as the majority of historians have agreed. He shows that the church of the century before Constantine was characterized by great evils, and that abominations so prevailed that, as Cyprian

said, it was not strange that God poured out his fury by grievous persecutions. Tracing the church to the first century, even to the apostolic age, he cites the description John gives of the several churches which had been planted in Asia, and shows that they were no better than many congregations in Europe in his own day, and concludes: "Nay, forty or fifty years before that, within thirty years of the descent of the Holy Ghost, were there not such abominations in the church of Corinth, as were 'not even named among the heathens'? So early did the 'mystery of iniquity' begin to work in the Christian Church! So little reason have we to appeal to 'the former days,' as though they were 'better than these!' "[29]

The church of our times is not only the most aggressively evangelistic of any period in its history, but it more nearly approximates the fulfillment of Christ's prayer that all his disciples might be one than at any time since our Lord ascended from the slopes of Olivet. The movements for federation among all Protestant denominations, for Christian unity among Romanists, Greeks, and Protestants, for the organic unification of the various branches of the great denominations, all point to a spirit which has never been in the world since the

[29] Wesley's Sermons, vol. ii, pp. 360–362.

day when corruptions began to despoil the church of her real purpose. It is within the memory of middle-aged persons that denominations and sects formerly struggled against one another with disagreeable frankness. That day has passed, and, if there is any danger on the horizon with respect to the various denominational bodies, it is that in their eagerness for federation the distinctive peculiarities which have made each of them strong in the evangelization of the world may be entirely lost, to the temporary detriment of religion.

Evangelistic Progress

The current enthusiasm for foreign missions is another evidence of the increasing concern of Christian people for the fulfillment of Christ's ambitions with respect to the salvation of the world. The vast opportunities for Christian teaching among the non-Christian populations of the globe have called forth, through the Student Volunteer Movement and other agencies for the recruiting of missionary forces, the finest workers the world has ever known. The church is at the same time being awakened to see the necessity for greatly increased revenues for the carrying forward of the missionary propaganda. We appear to be on the verge of a great revival of financial

offerings on the part of Christian people who are increasingly realizing the obligations of Christian stewardship.

The work of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, and kindred organizations is developing and extending not only through nominally Christian nations, but in all parts of the world, so that the churches find themselves in vigorous competition with institutions which have sprung from their own loins, and the general stream of beneficence proceeding from these various sources is daily widening until it gives promise of speedily encompassing the world.

No one who has visited the colleges and universities of America can have failed to observe the increasing attention paid to religion, and the remarkable results in the conversion of students which are everywhere apparent. Even in those institutions which are founded by the state and which, therefore, cannot of themselves encourage any distinctively denominational activities, there are to be found college pastors representing various divisions of the Christian Church, and their number is constantly increasing.

All students of the intellectual temper of our times, as it is related to the spiritual life,

must observe the decline of the materialism which held so prominent a place in the thought of twenty-five years ago, and the consequent ascendency of spiritual and ideal conceptions as the ruling motives of modern thought. The old hard-and-fast mechanical ideas with regard to the origin of life and the philosophy of conduct have passed away, and we are seeing a glorious revival of spiritual idealism such as has not captivated the world for many decades.

There is an unmistakable improvement in the social conscience of the people as a whole. The increasing influence of moral considerations in public and private life is remarkable. This is so obvious that it is unnecessary to go into detail about it. Everyone is aware of the upward trend of modern thought with regard to social amelioration. In this connection the grasp of the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is most striking. Religion is centering itself more and more in the twofold commandment which Jesus emphasized, and the age is requiring that all professions of faith in Christ shall justify themselves by the good works which tend to make the social conditions of our day more tolerable and helpful.

Everywhere reforms of a social, economic, industrial, and political nature are multiply-

ing to such an extent that they need but to be mentioned in order to be understood in their true relation to the general movement toward righteousness, which manifests itself in this day. Political reform, civic revolutions, humanitarian movements such as the effort to reduce and abolish child labor, the crusade for the destruction of the liquor oligarchy, the abolition of the opium traffic in China, the increased interest in the adjustment of the serious problems of marriage and divorce, the peace movements which, in spite of the European war, go on with accumulating strength, the vast amount of attention given to religious and moral questions in the periodical press and even in the ordinary daily newspapers—these, and a host of other things which any intelligent person can discern, are evidences of a growing concern for human welfare which aims at nothing less than that redemption of society which was so gloriously prophesied by the ancient Hebrew seers. The world is growing better by the hour.[30]

[30] Can we say this in the face of the world war? Nay, rather, *because* of the war. God is making the wrath of man to praise him as never before. The American people might have long delayed the extermination of the liquor traffic but for the war. God is the supreme strategist. He has seized his opportunity to awake the world to righteousness. The nations are learning the lesson God has been teaching through all the centuries—let us hope it will never be required again—that might cannot make right.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT ABOUT THE MILLENNIUM?

JESUS did not speak of a millennium. Paul and the other apostles did not mention it. No ancient prophet uses the word. Indeed, it is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Strictly speaking, it simply means a period of a thousand years. There is one passage in the book of Revelation which describes the reign of Christ and the martyred saints for a thousand years, Satan having been bound for that period.[1] That is the sole foundation on which is built the doctrine of a millennium in the sense usually taught by millenarians. Other passages are brought to it from various parts of the Scriptures, because they are thought to confirm or explain it; but it is probable that without these few verses there would have been no such conception of a millennium as is held by many Christians.

But long before the book of Revelation was written men dreamed of an age when righteousness and peace would be triumphant. Indeed, it seems to be an innate conviction of

[1] Revelation 20. 1–10.

mankind that in a world governed by a righteous God there must come a time when goodness will prevail in the earth. Even pagans have cherished this expectation, as is shown by the writings of Hesiod, Ovid, Vergil, and others. Every Bible student will remember the glowing pictures in the prophecy of Isaiah of a redeemed world in which there shall be concord among the forces of nature, the creatures of the animal world, and the human race.[2] In the prophecies of Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Malachi, and others there are predictions of "the day of Jehovah," in which punishment will be meted out to the false nations and to recreant Israel, followed by a reconstruction of the national life, in which the supremacy of righteousness will be attained. It is in the book of Daniel, however, that this idea is carried forward into its most spiritual implications. Not only is an everlasting kingdom to be established upon the ruins of alien empires, but the heavenly power by which this is to be accomplished will be embodied in "one like unto a son of man," who in the prophet's vision "came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the

[2] Isaiah 11. 1–9; also chapters 35, 55, 60.

peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."[3]

The Origin of the Millennial Idea

In the period of Jewish history just preceding the birth of Christ these ideas of the final establishment of an era of righteousness and peace took on more definite forms, and in the Book of Enoch, which has no place in our Bible, we have predictions which furnish a link between the apocalyptic messages of the ancient Hebrews and the New Testament teaching about "last things." Out of the indistinct visions of the oldest seers and the more precise announcements of the later Hebrew prophets there slowly grew such a doctrine of the victory of righteousness in the long ages to come as made it easy to develop the idea of a millennium, the trade-mark of which was an age of blessedness on the earth before and separate from the final happiness of the world to come.

But the imagination of man was not content with such restrained prophecies. Theories blossomed luxuriantly. Details were plentifully supplied. It was assumed that the his-

[3] Daniel 7. 13, 14.

tory of the world was divided into seven portions, corresponding with the seven days in the Genesis account of creation. Each of these divisions would cover a thousand years, and there would be six thousand years of labor, followed by a thousand years of rest. The last portion would be the millennium. This is a view which has its adherents to-day among Christians who are not familiar with the records of human existence on this planet, and who believe that the six thousand years are about completed, and that the seventh thousand will begin very shortly. On the other hand, some who realize the difficulty of adjusting history to such a chronology suggest that what are called "days-years," founded on 2 Peter 3. 8, are to be reckoned, and not years of twelve months each. This would make the time of the millennium 365,000 years of ordinary length. Many curious theories of computation have been advanced, including the suggestion that, in making account of prophetic measures of time, we must remember that astronomy reveals three kinds of years, namely, the solar, the lunar, and the calendar, determined by the different revolutions of the earth relative to the sun and the moon. By using each of these years as any particular case may require, dates can be shuffled to suit

one's preference. In the Talmud various fanciful descriptions of the blessedness which the millennium will bring are given, including the declaration that when the Messianic kingdom has been established each vine will yield a thousand branches, each branch a thousand clusters, each cluster a thousand grapes, and each grape twenty-five measures of wine.

Variations in Millennial Influence

The idea of the final reign of righteousness has captivated men everywhere even outside of Jewish and Christian influences. In our own times the thought of such a period possesses the imagination of multitudes. While not all speak of it as a definite period of a thousand years, they are looking forward to a time of ideal perfection in society. The only passage in Scripture on which the theory of a distinct period separated from that which precedes and from that which follows by clearly marked lines of distinction is based, is the one in Revelation already referred to. This seems to have been seized upon by the Christians of the first century, who doubtless expected the millennium to be inaugurated in the immediate future. When this did not occur, the ingenuity of men was set to work on the problem of explaining its delay. Eventually the doc-

trine itself became discredited because of the carnal ideas which were associated with it, especially by those who were affected by Jewish influences. It persisted, however, down to the fourth century of the Christian era, when the church was constrained to give it up by some of its foremost leaders, who supplanted it with other views. One of the most influential theories advanced came from the brain of Augustine, who said that the golden era had been in process ever since Christ established his church on the earth, and that the development of the Christian Church was in fact the millennium itself. That was taken so literally in connection with the passage in the twentieth chapter of Revelation that as the year A. D. 1000 approached, vast numbers of Christian people looked for the fulfillment of that prophecy, on the theory that the millennium was to precede Christ's return, after which would come the judgment and the end of the world. This did not happen, and new theories were demanded to account for the failure. A decline of interest in the subject naturally followed. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, in the sixteenth century, under the influence of a revived study of the Bible, new interest in the millennium was naturally awakened. But the grotesque and fleshly corruptions which the

Anabaptists and other extremists forced into the doctrine brought it into great disrepute. Since that period it has not enjoyed the favor it obtained in the early church. The majority of Christians have held that, while the millennium has not yet come, it will be eventually brought to pass through the triumph of Christianity, and that when it has arrived Christ will return, the gospel dispensation will be at an end, the judgment of humanity will be given, and the new order for mankind will be established.

Before or After the Return of Christ?

This is not a satisfactory theory to a very considerable body of Christians who insist that Christ will return to earth and assume a personal, visible, and bodily reign before any period which can be called the millennium has been inaugurated. Those who hold this opinion are called premillennialists, and those who hold a contrary opinion are called postmillennialists. On the supposition that there will be a definite period, separated from the rest of human history by strictly defined boundaries, and called the millennium, there is no necessary hostility between those Christians who contend that Christ will return before the thousand years begin and those who are

equally sure that he will not come again until after this period has been inaugurated. The one point on which all premillennialists are agreed is that Christ will appear before the millennium;[4] and apparently there is no other point on which all of them do unite, unless it be that the millennium will occupy a thousand years, during which Christ and his saints will reign on the earth. Even here there are differences of interpretation concerning the thousand years, some holding that the phrase must be interpreted literally, and others that it means an indefinite period of great extent.

But a majority of premillennialists do not content themselves with merely affirming that Christ is coming before the millennium. They fill the space between the present and the second coming of Christ with a picture so disheartening that one is amazed at the courage they show in the face of the tragedy they keep

[4] In a recent article Dr. Charles R. Erdman, of Princeton Theological Seminary, a convinced premillennialist, declared: "Only two things are essential to the premillennial theory: First, that there will be a personal return of Christ; and secondly, that an age of peace and righteousness will follow this return." If this were all that the majority of influential premillennialists were teaching as indispensable to their system, the author of this book would not have felt justified in making modern premillennialism an object of censure. One might think such a doctrine unwarranted in reason or revelation without regarding it as especially harmful. But this simple definition is far from satisfactory to the great body of premillennialists in our day.

before their eyes. They also accompany the second coming of Christ with events which are in contradiction of the teachings of Jesus, and they set up a program of procedure for Christ which breaks down under the weight of its own absurdity. Against such perversions of the simplicity of the gospel we may well direct our criticisms.

Scriptural Basis of the Millennium

These objectionable teachings will be examined in our next chapter. We must first give attention to the passage which lies at the foundation of all theories of the millennium that make it a strictly defined period of blessedness during which Christ will reign in visible and material splendor upon the earth. It is true that millenarians teach that the real basis of their doctrine is found in Hebrew prophecy, and that the famous passage in Revelation is a supplemental detail of an event already foretold. But so general are the terms of ancient prophecy and so capable are they of differing interpretations that, if it were not for this one passage, the citations from the Hebrew prophets would probably be regarded as chiefly proclaiming a far-off conquest of the world to righteousness and peace, such as mankind has always dreamed would some day

appear, only in a spiritual and lofty sense which no pagan mind has ever conceived. No description of this passage is required. We may let it speak for itself.[5]

It may not be amiss to suggest in this connection that a single passage is a somewhat unsafe basis on which to build so important a teaching as is the doctrine of the millennium.

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[5] "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut *it*, and sealed *it* over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

"And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20. 1–10).

This hint creates no hesitation in the mind of a confirmed millenarian, who insists that if there were but a solitary line on this subject in all the Bible, it would be perfectly adequate. But for the majority of Christians the absence of any other passage in the Bible of like import is exceedingly significant. The fundamental doctrines of Christianity are built upon many passages. If we had but one brief expression on which to construct our doctrine of the Trinity or of the deity of Jesus Christ, we should naturally be a little careful about the amount of dependence to be placed upon that isolated text.

Embarrassment is naturally increased if the one passage upon which a doctrine is built happens to be found in a book full of symbolical or allegorical language such as so abundantly pervades the book of Revelation. The doctrine of the millennium, as taught by many in our time, is based on one passage out of the most obscure and difficult book in the New Testament, the full meaning of which, it is safe to say, not even the wisest millenarian has yet been able satisfactorily to explain.

Still there are minds that would be satisfied with even such an uncertain foundation for a doctrine, provided the passage seemed to support a theory which was dear to them. But

even they must experience a little disquietude if they are shown that this passage, when literally interpreted, as they insist on doing, is in hopeless conflict with other scriptures when a literal interpretation is also given to them. This embarrassment will be clearly seen later when the claims of premillennialists are under examination. For the present it may be put aside, and it is mentioned here only to suggest caution in the use made of the passage before us.

The Book of Revelation

This remarkable piece of scripture can be interpreted without throwing overboard any other bit of writing in the New Testament, but this is possible only by permitting the book of Revelation to stand in its own quality instead of forcing upon it a character which it does not bear. It is a masterpiece of literary composition, a fact which ought not to be considered harmful to its spiritual values. The scholars say it is not written in the best Greek, but that does not seriously impair its worth as a book which speaks directly to the souls of men. The very practical people who turn scornfully away from this wonderful production because to them it is a phantasmagorical aberration of a too highly imaginative mind,

simply show how superficial they are. On the same ground they would hurl to the scrapheap Dante's immortal epic, Milton's Paradise Lost, and even Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. We have in this book an unsurpassed series of pictures which for boldness, vividness, and startling contrasts of light and shadow have never been approached by the genius of man. That fact should be allowed to sink to the depths of one's mind before undertaking to explain this extraordinary work.

It was produced in an age when the Christian Church was not only under suspicion in the Roman empire, but when those who called themselves Christians might well feel that the triumph of their faith was in actual doubt; when, therefore, the supreme need of the hour was to keep before the minds of Christians the truth that their Lord could not fail and that fidelity to him would bring certain rewards, while opposition to him would result in the destruction of his enemies. The letters to the seven churches of Asia one after another hold these things up before the mind, not only in graphic pictures, but also in stirring precepts. Those to whom they are addressed are told to be faithful unto death. Christ is coming to give every man his reward. Let them take heed that they do not lose their crown. To

him that overcometh shall be given an exceeding great recompense.[6]

The literary form of the book gives the key to the method by which it is to be interpreted. It is gloriously set forth at the very beginning. After a few introductory sentences the document opens with a vision of the eternal Christ. Certain letters to the seven churches then follow, and they are no sooner concluded than the series of visions is renewed, and they continue until the very end of the book. If people had kept in mind the form which the writer adopted, and had proceeded to interpret the book in the spirit in which it was evidently written, they would have been saved an immense amount of trouble and a still larger quantity of foolishness. In no other literature except that of the Bible do people undertake to interpret an allegory as they would a set of precepts. It seems to be offensive to certain minds to assume that the Holy Spirit would operate through a variety of literary forms. By some it is regarded as almost a piece of sacrilege to call any work in the Bible by its right designation. It seems to them to take away from the sublime spiritual motive of the Scriptures to assert that any human element is to be found within them.

[6] Revelation 2. 7, 10, 17, 26, 28; 3. 5, 12, 21.

If the book of Revelation were in any other compilation than the Bible, it would immediately be described as allegory, and no attempt would be made to consider it in any other light. It is no more an attack upon the spiritual quality of the Scriptures to call a piece of biblical literature poetry, allegory, fiction, or philosophy than it is to recognize that certain portions are history and other parts are divine ordinances.

Principles of Interpretation

If the book of Revelation is seen to be allegorical from beginning to end, it is a piece of impropriety to try to interpret it in any hard-and-fast literal sense. When we read the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments we do not hesitate to pronounce that they are to be taken as exactly what they appear to be, and, word for word, we set them down in our minds as rules of conduct which have been inspired by divine Wisdom. But when we take up other forms of writing found within the Scriptures, if we use only ordinary judgment, we strive to interpret them according to the mold into which their author has cast them. It would be an absurdity to interpret Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress as anything but an alle-

gory, but we do not lose the spiritual significance of that immortal work by adopting this plan. We agree that it is not a history of actual events, but that all the spiritual experiences which are therein narrated have a basis in fact. Thousands of human beings have proved them in their own lives. So the book of Revelation is not a record of things which have been, or a proclamation of things that are to be in the precisely factual manner that we concede to a work of history or a treatise on mathematics or a work on physical science. It is well within the ability of the modern engineer to tell us the quantity of coal stored up in the anthracite regions of our country, and to estimate with almost perfect accuracy the length of time that will be required to exhaust this supply at the present rate of consumption. But that is a process of exact computation, pursued according to methods which have been established through long years of study. But to declare that in the same way an examination of an allegorical book in the Scriptures will enable the investigator to set down in the calendar of history the events which are to follow through the course of time until eternity shall be revealed is nothing short of absurd. It would never have been dreamed of but for the fact that a

certain artificial character has been deliberately fastened upon the literature of the Scriptures.

Since the book of Revelation is of this character, the attempt to find an exact counterpart in real life, past, present, or future, to each of the items so dramatically presented within its pages is futile. He who puts his finger on a text and then points to an event, and says the one absolutely means the other, is involved in inextricable confusion. All through the Christian centuries men have been trying to do this. One dead-sure correspondence after another has been exploded by the developments of history. That has not daunted the literalist, who has gone straight on inventing new proofs for the identification of an event which occurred yesterday with something which the author of the book of Revelation predicted nineteen hundred years ago. It is an unprofitable performance.

The book of Revelation is not intended to be a mystery, but the unveiling of that which has been concealed. The symbolism in it was supposed by the author to be intelligible to those for whom his book was written. It is a revelation "of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, *even* the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent

and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John."[7] The writer gives in his book the visions which have glowed in his inspired mind, and he pronounces blessings upon those who read, those who hear, and those who keep the things he has recorded, saying, "The time is at hand."[8]

Christ appears in the beginning and he speaks at the end of the book. His glory irradiates every page. His triumph rises over all its scenes of strife and confusion. The book describes the conflicts of Christ and his saints and the victory they achieve. The struggle with sin and Satan is terrific, but it ends in the overthrow of iniquity. The church moves on from the wilderness to the land of promise; from trial to triumph.

Some devout scholars regard the book of Revelation as an expansion of Christ's apocalyptic discourse recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. A comparison of the ideas expressed in both will show strong resemblances. John's mind was filled with the imagery in the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Haggai, Joel, Zechariah, and Isaiah. The thought of Jewish Christians in his day is reflected by him. The millennial age he pictures

[7] Revelation 1. 1.
[8] Revelation 1. 3.

is the era of the Messiah which began with the establishment of the Christian dispensation. The end of that age he thinks to be near. Tested by ordinary computations of time, this could not be, but in the measurements of the divine mind John's prediction is right—"the time is at hand."

How to Deal with Chapter XX

From this point of view the process of interpreting the one basic millennial passage is not difficult. Let us first pursue the method we should use with any other book if we found in the midst of it a chapter which seemed, standing by itself, to resist all efforts to discover its significance. We should go back to that which preceded it and try to ascertain how the author had developed his thought until it reached that particular point. The nineteenth chapter of Revelation must be read, especially from the eleventh verse, in order to understand what is leading up to the twentieth chapter; and then the twenty-first chapter must be read to understand what is the end of the general scheme of this allegorical representation. Having read the nineteenth chapter, we are convinced that this is a vision of Christ conquering. No other per-

son in the universe could be called "King of kings and Lord of lords." What is he conquering? The nations of the world. How is he doing this? By the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. What does this militant exhibition mean? That the good is triumphant over the evil. Was that a thing of which the people of John's day needed assurance? It certainly was. Is that a thing of which we need to be assured? It certainly is.

But when did this crusade of conquest occur? and if it has not yet transpired, when will it commence? The answer is that it has been proceeding ever since Christ began his work in the world; that is, from that day in Eden when the work of redemption was announced, and the prophecy was uttered that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. And it will continue until the redemptive process has been finished and the triumph of the good has become known everywhere in the world. In other words, this is a vision of the divine struggle against iniquity, led by the Son of God, and it has been progressing during the entire existence of mankind on this planet.

But some say that this is a prophecy of the second coming of Christ. This is impossible. For it is totally unlike anything which Christ

foretold. It is out of harmony with everything the apostles said. Jesus declared that he would come suddenly on the clouds of glory to judge the world and to appoint men to their various destinies. That picture is wholly dissimilar to the contents of this passage, which represents a martial hero coming on a white horse, leading the armies of heaven, going out to a great fight. As is well known, premillennialists make this the concluding act in the drama of "the tribulation," a period of time which they have inserted between the coming of Christ to take his saints out of the world with him and the time when he and they will return to the earth to judge the world, a period of incredible suffering for humanity, to be closed by the utter destruction of the Antichrist. But this is an arbitrary performance which looks like an artifice deemed necessary to hold their program together in anything like a consistent scheme. We shall find later how utterly unwarranted this is, since it makes not one coming again of our Lord, but two such events, and disarranges the simple order of events proclaimed by our Lord. It is enough at this point to say that the picture in Revelation 19. 11-21 is a symbolical putting of the age-long contest between right and wrong under the leadership of Christ, as opposed by

his enemies, which is to ensue at last in the complete overthrow of iniquity and the consummate triumph of righteousness.

The Binding of Satan

An intelligent approach to the millennial passage, Revelation 20. 1-10, is thus made possible. The fight is not going to last forever. An angel with the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain binds Satan and flings him into prison for a thousand years. Let us remember that this is an allegorical book—and let us not seek a literal interpretation for the chain, the key, or the thousand years. To do so is to defeat the very spirit of the book. What are a thousand years in the illimitable time at the disposal of the eternal Son of God? The significance of what is written by Peter is clear: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[9] He has all the time there is, and every epochal event in the career of the world is a proof that he takes all the time he deems necessary and experiences no sense of haste or urgency, knowing that eternity is his.

There is, in fact, no certainty that any time element whatever enters into the meaning of

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[9] 2 Peter 3. 8.

the thousand years. Wherever else John uses numbers—and he does so from end to end of this book with astonishing frequency—they are employed as symbols. Why should we imagine that in this single passage he departs from his uniform practice? By comparing instance with instance in his usage we ascertain what is signified by three, four, seven, twelve, and the rest. But he mentions the thousand years in this one place alone, so that we cannot make comparisons, and thus arrive at the meaning he wished to convey. One thing, however, is so plain that it may serve as a reliable guide—John does not use numbers as exact measures of time and space. They seem invariably to symbolize qualities, characteristics, conditions, and the like. Is it reasonable to suppose that we have in the thousand years a startling exception? that for once he breaks abruptly from his habitual method? Is it not safer to say that this phrase expresses something other than duration of time? A devout scholar has suggested that it conveys the idea of completeness,[10] and nothing else. This is a clever interpretation, as

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[10] "Satan is bound for a thousand years; that is, he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years; that is, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory" (The Revelation of St. John, William Milligan, D.D.).

explained by this writer, but it is not wholly satisfactory, as the student will discover when he attempts to apply it to every item in the passage. Yet it looks in the right direction, and is vastly better than a literal understanding of the thousand years, a theory beset with difficulties which no man has ever mastered. The truth seems to be that when John, under divine inspiration, was intent upon finding a suitable figure to express the certainty of the devil's defeat, the thoroughness of Christ's victory, and the eternal security of the saints, he comprehended the drama of redemption in one swift panorama, just as the old prophets had done, and called the whole movement a thousand years. This number he had not used elsewhere, nor had he found it with this significance in the Old Testament. In its very singularity, as well as in its completeness, it would signify to readers acquainted with the symbolism of numbers the idea of a glorious triumph of righteousness over iniquity.

Furthermore, there is nothing elsewhere in the Bible to justify the theory of a limited space in history to be filled by an era of unwonted peace and righteousness, and to be followed by a period of unparalleled wretchedness and sin. Premillennialists are continually saying that such a millennium as this passage

promises when literally interpreted is foretold by the ancient prophets.[11] This is not true. The old seers did foretell a golden age of peace and righteousness to follow the advent of the Messiah. We believe their predictions are at this moment in process of fulfillment, and that in due time they will reach complete fulfillment. But no prophet ever mentioned a period of a thousand years, or any other length, during which righteousness would be triumphant, and which would terminate in disaster. Let us put aside once for all this notion of a gap in history, a sacred hiatus, a holy parenthesis, like a lucid interval in a delirium, followed by a frightful relapse. When the reign of peace and righteousness has fully come, as come it must, it will remain forever. Any other expectation is without warrant in Scripture or reason.

What is described in this passage, therefore, is not a millennium of the saints, nor a period of righteousness and peace for the world, but the overthrow of the devil. It is not a picture of a short episode in the history of mankind,

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[11] Says Nathaniel West: "Such is the organic and genetic character of revelation and of prophecy, that if 'the thousand years' are not in Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets, they have no right to be in John"; and he labors through many unconvincing pages to prove that "the thousand years" are in both Testaments.

but a symbolical phrasing of a process continuing through all the centuries, or a figurative showing of a permanent situation, namely, that the devil is defeated, and has been ever since the incarnate Son of God engaged him in deadly conflict. Faith anticipates his final destruction, conceives it as already accomplished, and accepts it as a fact which is not open to discussion. As for the saints, they are absolutely safe. The devil cannot hurt them. Neither can he permanently deceive the nations. He is always being found out, and is routed from one position to another till the hour of his final extinction.

While Satan is conceived in this passage as defeated, it is recognized that temporarily he is simply under restraint. His absolute destruction will be effected later. Now he is but crippled. He is in a pit that is bottomless. He is sealed up that he may not escape. But he is a spirit and stone walls and steel bulwarks cannot completely neutralize the operations of a spiritual being whose access to spiritual beings is by means of spiritual channels of communication. Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's body rests under a massive block of stone, but her influence for evil will go on for generations. Mohammed has been bound in the tomb for many centuries, but he still inspires

the atrocities of the Turk. Satan's power is not finished, but it is much restrained.

But this binding of Satan: when did it begin and what does it mean? It began as soon as Christ opened the dispensation in which we are now living. We know the devils were subject to him. We know that he throttled Satan on the mount of temptation. We know that he said, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."[12] We know that the Son of God was "manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."[13] We know that through all the long centuries of human history he has been doing this thing, and this is the binding which is symbolized in the material figures employed by John.

Has Christ actually been binding Satan through the centuries? Observe the marks of his triumph. Where is human slavery in civilized nations to-day? When it was put out of the way a great chain was wound around the adversary. It is not necessary to go into detail at this point. Further exposition of the increasing triumph of righteousness in the world appears elsewhere in these pages. Attention need here be called only to the fact that, in our own generation, the progressive

[12] Luke 10. 18.
[13] 1 John 3. 8.

conquests of Christ have been remarkably displayed.

But, is Satan crippled in any definite sense? How can a Christian doubt this? Does he suppose that evil is left unrestrained to make havoc in the world? Knowing the inveterate character of sin, does any man doubt that if it were left without restraint it would have long since utterly destroyed the human family? In a still higher sense, is it not true that saved people, those reckoned to be saints, are exempt from the attacks of sin which so terribly devastate those who have not turned to God? Did not Christ himself say that no one was competent to pluck out of his hands those whom God had committed to him?[14] It seems amazing that anybody should doubt that Satan's power in the earth, not only in the large way described in historic events, but in the narrower and more individualistic forms of contact with persons, has been gradually crippled in this gospel dispensation through the preaching of the truth, the means of grace, and the protection of the Holy Spirit.

The Enthronement of Saints

But what shall be said about the saints reigning with Christ during the thousand

[14] John 10. 28, 29.

years—not merely those who were martyred, but all who worshiped not the beast? The answer is another question. Can we think that these saints are dead, and that they are awaiting the coming of the Lord? that they are in some inactive or unconscious state, and that until they are called from their graves they have no participation in the blessedness of the life hid with Christ in God? The conception is revolting, and has no foundation in anything Christ has taught. Where are these saints? With Christ, of course. Where else could they be? Have they not been going to him through all these long centuries? Are they not with him now? Jesus said in his great priestly prayer, "I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."[15] In a deep spiritual sense, are they not reigning?

The passage does not say *where* the saints are reigning. Premillennialists affirm it is on the earth. The text simply declares "with Christ." It does not state that Christ is on the earth. An angel does the binding of Satan. What is here pictured, as has often been remarked, seems more like an ascent of the saints to heaven than a descent of Christ to the earth.

"The rest of the dead lived not until the

[15] John 17. 24.

thousand years should be finished."[16] Nothing could be plainer. Only the good who are dead have risen into that eternal life which Christ came to reveal. The evil who are dead are still dead in trespasses and in sin. We know that is fact, because Jesus declared it: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."[17] "This is the first resurrection." It is a continuous process through all the ages. As men hear the voice of God in Christ and respond they live, and as they turn deaf ears to that voice they die. It is not a question of the dissolution of their physical bodies, but rather of choices which they make. There will be for those who refuse the voice of the Son of God as well as for those who have heard his voice and respond a final resurrection when their bodies will indeed come out of the graves. That is the only resurrection which the spiritually dead will ever have. The good will rise to everlasting life. The bad will rise to everlasting condemnation. That is their second death, for evil people die twice, once when they pass out of this earthly life, and again when they are condemned to eternal death. But the saint dies only once, though he has a

[16] Revelation 20. 5.
[17] John 5. 25.

double resurrection. He rises to life eternal when he hears and responds to the summons of Christ, and he rises with the glorified body at last when all who are in their graves shall come forth. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."[18]

But when the thousand years are over, it is said Satan will be released. Undoubtedly, for his destruction must be brought about by contact with the conquering forces of righteousness in a final conflict. In the last desperate charge essential to his complete overthrow the saints will have their glorious part. It is perfectly natural that evil should come to its most hideous climax in that ultimate struggle—which does not mean that there will be a vaster number of evil people on the earth than ever cursed the world before, but that the character of sin is such that its most virulent development will come at the end of the age.

Christ's Second Coming

But Christ's forces will win. The nations will be brought to his standard, and then he will come in visible presence, when the final

[18] Revelation 20. 6.

stroke will be delivered by the Mighty One who through centuries has led his hosts. He will come to take his kingdom and to absorb all kingdoms into it. He will sit in judgment as he himself precisely predicted. Then the ultimate overthrow of evil will be established before angels and men. All this is described in the passage beginning with Revelation 20. 11, and running to the end of the chapter. Iniquity will then no longer curse the earth. A new heaven and a new earth, as typified by the imagery of the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, will be brought to pass. Immortal glory and everlasting development toward God will be the blessed fortune of the redeemed. As John has so gloriously said: "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[19]

[19] 1 John 3. 2, 3.

CHAPTER X

MILLENNIAL FANCIES AND FALLACIES

"The Polynesians imagine that the sky descends at the horizon and incloses the earth," says Max Müller. For this reason they name foreigners "heaven-bursters," people who have broken in from an outside world. In his Apocalypse John says, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."[1] This is the finest phrasing we have of humanity's fadeless dream that the celestial world will some day enswathe the earth. The hope is divinely inspired, its fulfillment is sure.

The expectation of the final triumph of Christ and his saints, attended by the establishment of a universal kingdom of righteousness and peace, is such a glorious inspiration to faith and godliness that it is an incalculable misfortune that its beauty should be marred by attaching to it crude and fantastic theories of the millennium and the process by which this period of felicity is to be introduced.

[1] Revelation 21. 2.

Reference has been made several times in these pages to the artificial programs which premillennialists have devised to precede, accompany, and follow the second advent of Christ. It is difficult to treat all the advocates of these schemes of the future with perfect fairness because they differ much among themselves, as an examination of the plentiful literature they have issued will prove.[2] However, the framework of their several structures is practically the same. It may be roughly outlined, though the frequent appearance of books on the subject, with their divergent theories, leaves the impression that in details the doctrine, like the time-tables of certain steamboat lines, is subject to change without notice.

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[2] In an article by a premillennialist of high standing, to which we have already referred (page 211), twelve things ordinarily accredited to premillennialists are said by the writer to be not essential to their doctrine. Among these are the following beliefs: That the world is growing worse; that Jesus will return to Palestine; that Christ will reign in an Oriental court in Jerusalem, and that the saints will appear as rulers on the earth; that the 20th chapter of Revelation is necessary for the argument for the millennium; that there will be a secret removal of the saints before the Lord appears in wrath to destroy the Antichrist; that there will be two resurrections and three judgments; that this world will be destroyed. However, all of these are among the cherished beliefs of the mass of premillennialists, as was immediately proved by printed attacks upon this writer's views. In fact, premillennialism would have little charm for thousands who hold it but for these and other dramatic accompaniments with which premillennialists adorn their doctrine.

In a general way, however, the following may be regarded as a truthful declaration of premillennial teaching, as presented by its most influential expositors.

The Premillennial Program

1. It is a mistake, say the extreme premillennialists, to suppose the Christian Church has anything to do with bringing in the millennium. It is showing itself less and less able to do this every day.

2. The preaching of the gospel is not for the purpose of saving the world. Nothing can do that. The gospel is preached as a witness. Its principal end is to gather out of the visible church the elect, the saints, those who are the body of Christ.

3. The world is steadily growing worse, and will increase in wickedness till God can no longer permit it to continue. The church is becoming relatively feebler and less spiritual every day. It seems now to be in its last stage of decline.

4. Toward the rapidly approaching end of the present age or dispensation, the very climax of iniquity will be reached, and evil in some incomparably terrible form will appear. Then, when affairs are at their lowest, and

while the world is entirely absorbed in fleshly interests, Christ will suddenly return.

5. By that time "the body of Christ" will have been completed, that is, the full number of the elect will have been converted. This is all that is required of the Christian dispensation.

6. Instantly the saints who are in their graves will be raised from the dead, and in company with the saints who are then living on the earth, will be caught up in the air to meet their Lord, and continue with him there for a season. In the parlance of premillennialists, this is "The Rapture."

7. During this period of communion between Christ and the elect, apart from the world, what is known as "The Great Tribulation" will occur on the earth. It will last three and a half, seven, or forty-five years, according to the passage of Scripture selected and the interpretation preferred. It will be a time of unexampled suffering. It is in this stretch of agony that the Antichrist will appear. Those who refuse to give him their homage will be slain, and will be known as "the tribulation saints."

8. It is during this time also that the unbelieving Jews will be gathering to Palestine. They will rebuild the temple, restore the an-

cient sacrifices, make a covenant with the Antichrist, and give themselves over to the most desperate wickedness.

9. Following this interval of anguish Christ and the saints who were caught up in the air will return to find the world largely given over to apostasy, for the majority of the people will have yielded obeisance to the Antichrist. This crisis is by premillennialists called "The Revelation," because this return of Christ and the saints will be visible to everyone, whereas "The Rapture," or taking away of the elect to meet Christ in the air, will not have been observed by mankind generally.

10. The Antichrist will now be put away, having been destroyed by the power of Christ's wrath. The "tribulation saints" will be raised from the dead. The devil will be chained for a thousand years. The nations having been judged, Christ will establish his millennial reign.

11. The Jews will be restored to Palestine and gathered into Christ's kingdom. Jerusalem will become the capital of the world. Jesus will sit on his throne, his saints reigning with him. They will extend their power over all the earth.

12. A period of peace and righteousness will now have been inaugurated. The physi-

cal universe will be so changed as to conform to the requirements of this new era.

13. After this period of blessedness, designated as a thousand years, commonly known as the millennium, the devil will be let loose for a little space. The most dreadful consequences will ensue. Satan's host will grow to an enormous magnitude.

14. Presently the final struggle between Christ and his saints and the devil and his forces will occur. The Armageddon will be fought. Unrighteousness will suffer absolute defeat. The devil will be completely destroyed.

15. Then the heavenly order of human society will be established, never again to be interrupted by the devil, as was the millennium, and Christ and his saints will reign forever.

16. The signs of the times, according to premillennialists, show that the hour of Christ's return is near. "The Rapture," or taking away of the saints to meet the Lord in the air, may occur at any moment, for any instant "the body of Christ" may be completed. The church is fast approaching her end; already the great apostasy is showing itself. The world is on the brink of its abyss of infamy: the world-war proves it. To-day the hour of doom may strike.

Additional details are given by some premillennialists with an exuberant fancy which knows no curb, but they are not essential to this general outline.

It will be noted that the outstanding features of this schedule are: (1) The inevitable moral decline of the world, which is thought to be growing worse every day. (2) The equally certain decline of the church, which in proportion to its number of adherents is becoming less spiritual every day. (3) The failure of the present dispensation to accomplish more than the proclamation of the gospel and the gathering of a remnant of saints with whom to make a new beginning. (4) The absolute necessity that Christ should appear in bodily presence to set up the kingdom of God on earth, though that kingdom was declared to be "at hand" nineteen centuries ago. (5) The certainty that this kingdom will put forth its power in a material, physical, or earthly fashion.

Structure of the Schedule

This plan of the future is a composite of passages taken arbitrarily from many parts of the Old Testament and the New, and cemented together by the ingenuity of men who take delight in such feats of skill. Fundamental to

this mosaic is the twentieth chapter of Revelation, to which consideration has already been given in these pages. It is true that much not found in this chapter has been employed to introduce elements of importance. Nevertheless, the conception of the millennium, without which this schedule would be impossible, has no scriptural foundation outside this passage. Premillennialists hold that Revelation 20 is to be taken literally. They believe that the author of the Apocalypse was inspired to set down this prophecy word for word as it appears, and they quote his anathema against any who may be rash enough to take away from the words of his book.[3] But they also believe that every other part of the Bible is inspired in the same way, and must be literally interpreted, save where the language is declared to be figurative by the writer or plainly indicated to be such by the very manner in which it is used. Special stress is laid upon the necessity of giving a literal interpretation to Christ's words, as recorded in the four Gospels, and to the Epistles of Paul, who wrote more of the New Testament than any other man. On the supposition that this is the correct attitude toward the interpretation of Scripture, let us put this passage in Revela-

[3] Revelation 22. 19.

tion 20 beside other teachings of the New Testament which deserve equal respect and veneration, and observe the result.

"Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?"

An exposition of Christ's personal teachings respecting his second advent has been made in previous chapters, and need not now be reviewed. Paul added a few things to the subject which are supplementary to the words of Jesus, and in harmony with them. The following passages are of chief significance: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."[4] This description corresponds with what Christ says about his advent being as a flash of lightning across the sky.[5]

In order to comfort the Thessalonians who were sorrowing for lost loved ones, and wondering whether, on the supposition that Christ's return was very near, these departed friends and relatives would share the triumph of their Lord with those who were alive at his coming, Paul writes to them: "But we would

[4] 1 Corinthians 15. 51, 52.

[5] Matthew 24. 27.

not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."[6]

Having added these descriptive passages to what we have already examined in the teachings of Christ and his apostles, let us compare with these scriptures a literal interpretation of the twentieth chapter of Revelation. The world is going on in its customary way when suddenly, in an instant, a voice is heard and Christ appears. Then the saints who are dead, both the martyred ones mentioned in this passage and also all the faithful servants of Christ

[6] 1 Thessalonians 4. 13–18.

who are asleep in death, and with them the righteous who are alive, will be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds. Their bodily resurrection at the second coming of Christ is clearly taught.[7] Now attach this to Revelation 20. 1-3. An angel from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand is represented as binding Satan and flinging him into the abyss and sealing it up so that for a thousand years he will not be at liberty to deceive the nations.

Those Who Remain After "The Rapture"

What shall we say about the persons who are still alive and upon the earth? The saints have been caught up to meet their Lord. The devil has been banished from the earth, but the unsaved who are alive are still on this planet. They are going on as before, and will continue for a thousand years, during which thirty generations will be born and die. These unsaved people have no Satan to tempt them, for he is in prison. But neither have they any saints to teach them righteousness, and there is no intimation of any turning to God during this millennium in the only passage in the Bible which mentions it. Knowing what we do about the tendency of sin to increase, we should expect

[7] 1 Corinthians 15. 23, 35, 44.

a terrible moral and spiritual decline within the thousand years.

But it may be said that the supposition is that the saints who were caught up in the air to be with their Lord have returned. Yet the naked text does not say so. It simply declares they are reigning with Christ during the thousand years. It does not fix the place. But suppose it is on the earth. Remember the unsaved are still there. They are marrying and giving in marriage. They are buying and selling. They are giving birth to children. They are dying. Alongside of them, if the saints have returned with their Lord, are people who have died and risen from the dead and will never die again. Is such a mixture of relationships credible? A part of the population are immortals who cannot die, and a part are mortals who must die, living together on the same planet. Surely, this is confusing the present age with the age to come in a most astonishing way, and is to thoughtful persons unbelievable.

But suppose the saints with the Lord have not returned to the earth, but are still somewhere between heaven and earth, and plainly in sight of the wicked who are still living and dying on the earth. This is as incomprehensible as the former hypothesis. What has

become of the idea of human probation? The conditions are now so changed that the people who live in the millennial period and those who had lived before it must certainly be judged by totally different standards. Nothing else would be fair and just, but such an adjustment is not mentioned, and would be incredible.

Conflict with Reason and Revelation

But suppose the saints are neither on earth nor in the upper air, but have actually disappeared into heaven just as Christ did at his ascension. Then we have this dilemma: Christ has appeared to everybody's view, as he himself prophesied, and as the Apocalypse of John affirms.[8] He has disappeared from the earth, taking with him all the saved people living and dead. Later he returns to the earth with the saints to judge the world. This, then, will be his third coming to the world and not his second advent, which teaching is contrary to every other part of the scriptures referring to the subject.

But these difficulties are not the end of trouble. When the thousand years are over, according to the passage before us, Satan is to be released, and he is to be welcomed by

[8] Revelation 1. 7.

a host as numerous as the sands of the sea,[9] who follow him and make war upon the saints who have either been on the earth, in the mid-air, or in heaven, and have returned. In any case it is obvious that the people who live through the millennium have been, in the main, a most degenerate population, or the devil would not have such a massive army back of him. Thus the millennium is shown to have been, not a triumphant and universal reign of righteousness, but a time of increasing moral and spiritual decline. Things have gone to the bad most disastrously.

Furthermore, if Christ has been reigning on the earth in visible presence during that period of a thousand years, we are compelled to conclude that the revolt against him and his government has occurred in spite of the majesty of his presence, and the power of his sovereignty. This is, of course, unthinkable. Moreover, it is not credible that Christ would retreat from the kingdom over which he has been ruling for a thousand years in order that his enemy, the devil, might have a final chance to display his power, even though it were for the purpose of the ultimate manifestations of the glory and supremacy of Christ.

In any case, Satan's triumph is short. Fire

[9] Revelation 20. 8.

falls from heaven, the great throne appears, the books of judgment are opened, and all men are compelled to render an account according to their works. Nevertheless, what is put forth by a literal interpretation of this passage is that when Christ comes the second time he is to have but a temporary and abortive reign of a thousand years before he has his final victory over Satan and hell. This is simply contradictory of all the scriptures outside of this one passage which bear on Christ's second advent. A literal interpretation of Revelation 20 cannot be fitted into a literal interpretation of other important parts of the Bible.

But there are more definite and impressive conflicts with the scriptures than even those which have been just mentioned. Let us take up some of them.

Direct Contradictions of Scripture

Jesus said that at his return the sun and moon would cease to shine, and the stars would fall from heaven.[10] This implies the breaking up of the present order of nature. In Revelation 20. 11 we have the more vivid description—"from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." But this disturbance in

[10] Matthew 24. 29; Mark 13. 24, 25.

the universe occurs after the thousand years, according to this passage. If, therefore, Christ comes before the thousand years and, in accordance with his own proclamation in his great apocalyptic discourse, there is a catastrophe in the physical order at that time, we have two such ordeals, and between them stretch a thousand years. After breaking up the universal order at his coming the world must have been set going again for a thousand years. Then it was broken up once more, and the platform upon which the millennium has been proceeding is torn to pieces a second time. Between these catastrophes Satan has been released and has been given an opportunity to assault the hosts of righteousness.

How Many Judgments?

At the conclusion of his apocalyptic discourse we have Christ's wonderful picture of the final judgment, beginning as follows: "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." He finishes this graphic

picture by announcing that those on his left hand will go into everlasting punishment, while the righteous shall go into life eternal. This is the final judgment, and it is to occur at our Lord's second coming, as he himself says.[11]

Now, if that second coming is to be before the thousand years described in Revelation 20, then we must suppose that after this separation at the judgment the wicked who have been given their doom assert themselves again when the thousand-year period has been concluded; for, according to this passage, a horrid crew as numberless as the sands of the sea comes out to battle against the hosts of righteousness, as described in verse 9. To say that after the judgment at the second coming this will occur, and a thousand years later, is unthinkable. Moreover, as recorded in verses 12 and 15, the final judgment is to take place no one can tell exactly when, but at least subsequent to the millennium. So that we have two judgments separated by at least a thousand years.

How Many Resurrections?

Jesus announced that all that are in their graves shall one day hear his voice and shall

[11] Matthew 25. 31–46.

come forth; they that have done good into the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil into the resurrection of condemnation. This can only refer to the final resurrection and judgment at his coming; but in the millennial passage we read: "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, *even* the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire."[12] Thus we have two resurrections and judgments, separated by a thousand years. In the first resurrection the saints, or the elect known as the body of Christ, will be raised. Then the thousand years will pass, and both the good and the bad, saved and unsaved, who have lived and died during the period of the thousand years will be raised; and this in addition to the spiritual resurrection referred to in John 5. 25 and Ephesians 2. 6. Three resurrections are in utter discord with the plan mentioned in all other passages in the New Testament, and must be dismissed as irreconcilable with reason.

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[12] Revelation 20. 13–15.

Christ also announced that he would raise his people on the last day.[13] In order to accommodate the double resurrection separated by a thousand years, as required by a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, we are compelled to call the whole period "the last day." That is, "the last day," which may be understood as a single period of indefinite length, must include the resurrection of the righteous, the thousand-year binding of Satan, his release, the assault and overthrow of Gog and Magog, and the final judgment. Merely to state this dilemma is to refute the acceptance of this passage as literal.

Paul speaks of the voice which will awaken the servants of Christ at "the last trump."[14] But, according to the premillennial theory founded on this passage from Revelation 20, the righteous are raised before the millennium and the wicked after it. There are two resurrections separated by a thousand years. The wicked are raised latest, and after the thousand-year period. Hence "the last trump" is for them, according to this theory, though Paul says the dead in Christ rise first. Therefore, the trump which Paul speaks of can be, not the last, though he says it is, but some pre-

[13] John 6. 39, 40, 44.
[14] 1 Corinthians 15. 52.

vious trump, with a period of a thousand years between.

An Irreconcilable Theory

Without going into further details concerning the hopeless conflict between a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, and all other passages of the New Testament bearing on the question of Christ's second coming, we may leave the problem for those who are advocates of premillennialism to solve. There will be some who, on reading this comparison, will declare that in it the word of God has been handled deceitfully, but this will not be true. It may be affirmed in all solemnity, calling God to witness, that nothing has been done in this exposition but to place over against a literal interpretation of the passage from Revelation a certain number of unquestionable declarations from the lips of Christ himself and from the writings of his apostles, to show the utter impossibility of harmonizing the latter with the former on the supposition that all parts of Scripture are equally inspired, and to be literally interpreted. Instead of one definite second coming of Christ, we have two separate second advents of our Lord. Instead of one bodily resurrection, we have two or more. Instead of one cataclysm in

nature, we have two, with a thousand years rolling between. Instead of one final judgment, we have a variety of judgments. Of course this cannot be without giving up what Christ and his apostles have said.

The premillennialists ask us so to twist what Christ and his apostles have uttered about the second coming as to make all the scriptures conform to this one obscure passage out of an admittedly allegorical book. Mere common sense would seem to dictate that if anything must be surrendered it is not the teaching of Christ and his apostles outside of this passage, but, rather, the one passage which cannot be made to fit into the others, if it is to be interpreted literally.

As a matter of fact, nothing is to be given up, if we apply to the Scriptures reasonable methods of interpretation. In the last chapter a view of Christ's second coming was broadly sketched, which is consistent with the teachings of Christ and his apostles, and in harmony with the figurative character of Revelation 19-21. The details of the Apocalypse of John are beyond the ability of any man now living to interpret with fidelity to each minute and microscopic item. No work of a similar character in any literature, sacred or secular, could be interpreted to its last infinitesimal point

a thousand years after its author's decease, unless he had left a key to unlock its mysterious symbolism. The vain effort to explain every detail in the Apocalypse of John is particularly unprofitable, in view of the fact that its main purposes are as clear as the noonday sun.

Further Criticisms and Objections

In Chapter VIII the fallacy of supposing that the world is inevitably growing worse, and the church correspondingly weaker, was shown by an appeal to the Scriptures and the records of history and current life. In the same connection it was demonstrated that the function of the church is larger than merely to provide the medium through which the gospel shall be preached as a witness and a company of the elect gathered out of humanity, with whom Christ will judge the world and establish his kingdom on the earth. In the last chapter it was shown that the millennial era progresses from the beginning of the gospel dispensation to the final return of Christ to judgment and universally acknowledged sovereignty. In various places the follies of a mechanical millenarianism have been exposed. It would be useless to follow up each vagary about Christ's second advent which

has appeared in print. The number is legion, and their influence is narrow. Certain theories, prominent in nearly all premillennial teaching, however, demand brief attention, as illustrations of the way in which the Scriptures are misapplied, when, indeed, they are not supplanted by purely human inventions.

Rapture, Tribulation, Revelation

One of the most flagrant examples of the artificial, arbitrary, and fantastic manipulations of Scripture of which some premillennialists are guilty is the process by which the program of events connected with what are known as "The Rapture, "The Tribulation," and "The Revelation" is set forth in their dismal scheme. We are told that we must clearly distinguish between these occurrences, or we shall be in great difficulties. Starting with 1 Thessalonians, 4. 7, we are told that here we have the first fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ's second coming, which event is to be clearly separated from his actual coming to judge the world. What happens is that the saints who are alive, together with the saints who are dead and have been resurrected, are translated to meet the Lord in the air. This is called "The Rapture," and occurs without being observed by the world in general. The

real foundation for this teaching is the passage just named. But to give it larger significance, other parts of Scripture which can be bent toward this event are brought in. Reliance is placed, for example, on Luke 21. 28, the words of Jesus when, after describing the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the distress of nations which shall come upon the world, together with the advent of the Son of man in the clouds, it is said: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh."[15] This is a good example of the manner in which Scripture is distorted. The phrases "look up" and "lift up" are supposed to point to the coming of Christ in the air; and the clause "your redemption draweth nigh" is taken to mean the first resurrection, and is said to be a parallel with Romans 8. 23, where are used the words "waiting for *our* adoption, *to wit,* the redemption of our body." Other passages are used in like fashion, but there is no need to consider them, one illustration being sufficient.

Now ensues a period of terrific suffering; the church, the bride of Christ, the saints, the elect, or by whatever term we care to designate the risen and glorified servants of Christ, hav-

[15] Luke 21. 28.

ing been taken away from the earth. During this period of excessive tribulation, which is not of long duration, the Antichrist is revealed,[16] the vials of God's wrath are poured forth, and the process of restoring Israel begins. Following this is a point of time called "The Revelation." This marks Christ's actual second coming to the earth when he appears to judge the quick and the dead and destroys the Antichrist. This dramatic series is amply supported by quotations from the Scriptures, but by such juggling of texts as one would think impossible on the part of a candid and intelligent Christian. Against such unworthy methods a protest was filed in Chapter I, to which the reader is referred.[17] There can be but one second coming of our Lord, and the simple language in which he predicted it gives no warrant for embellishing the event with artificial attachments.

It is interesting to note why and in what manner this program is set up. It is asserted that the time of our Lord's coming to the earth is preceded by his coming in the air to receive his bride, the church, unto himself, because Christ has much to do with his church before he comes back with his church to deal with the

[16] 2 Thessalonians 2. 8.

[17] See pages 11–15.

world. This explains, it is said, what Paul teaches about the restraint which is placed upon the man of sin.[18] This restraint has something to do with the church. The church must be removed before the lawless one can be revealed on the earth; that is, before the Antichrist can stand forth in such a visible exhibition as to be recognized and destroyed.

It is affirmed that the Scriptures do not anywhere say that there will not be a considerable interval between the coming of Christ in the air and his coming with his saints to the earth, and, therefore, it is legitimate to assume such an interval, in view of what it is believed the church will require. Such a method of filling out the Bible from one's imagination is dangerous, but it is characteristic of premillennialists. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Scriptures to show that the coming of Christ to receive his saints who are caught up in the air to meet him will precede his coming to the earth to judge the quick and the dead. That is also a pure invention.

Other Guesses

"The Tribulation" is equally a matter of conjecture. Taking the words found in Matthew 24. 21-22; Mark 13. 24; Luke 21. 22-24,

[18] 2 Thessalonians 2. 7.

which a sound exegesis must make refer to the siege of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews, as the context plainly shows, and connecting them up with Daniel 12. 1, a period of distress preceding the final judgment is satisfactorily arranged.

Now, it is perfectly clear that the men who recorded Christ's apocalyptic discourse believed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment were practically two phases of one great event. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Christ said: "Immediately after the tribulation,"[19] that is, after the destruction of Jerusalem, shall come what amounts to a dissolution of nature and betokens the coming of Christ to final judgment. In Mark's account we have, "In those days after that tribulation,"[20] which has been previously described. In Luke's account, there is no note of time, though there is a full description of the distress.[21] This whole tribulation, so far as it lay in the minds of the men who wrote the Gospels, is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, which we are to observe was identified in their minds with the final judgment. There is no warrant for placing this tribula-

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[19] Matthew 24. 29.
[20] Mark 13. 24.
[21] Luke 21. 20–24.

tion at some remote period just preceding the final judgment, as premillennialists will have it, though it may be held that all the events at the destruction of Jerusalem are types of what will occur on a larger scale at the end of the age. But this is not a matter of revelation. The Bible is silent on it. The prophecies in Daniel were extant when Jesus uttered this apocalyptic discourse, and doubtless he knew precisely their meaning. Had he intended to make any such use of these prophecies as the premillennialists have adopted, he would have explicitly said so. And the very passage which is used to confirm the statement that our Lord had Daniel in his mind, indeed, he actually quoted him,[22] so unmistakably refers to the siege of Jerusalem that it seems singular for anybody to make any other interpretation.

The reason for inserting this "Tribulation" as a part of the final judgment in the program of the premillennialists between "The Rapture" and "The Revelation," or final coming of Christ to judgment with his saints, is quite innocently given by some who advocate it. They say that this distinction between the two stages of his coming again helps to explain many apparent discrepancies in the Bible on

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[22] Matthew 24. 15; Mark 13. 14.

the subject of the second advent. Such a confession is amusing. The discrepancies referred to occur because of the unjustifiable use which is made of Scripture in order to fit a certain theory. There are no such difficulties if we remember that in some parts of Christ's apocalyptic discourse he was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and in other parts to the final judgment.

As a matter of fact, there are no passages of Scripture which describe any such period of tribulation between Christ's coming to take his saints and his coming to judge the world. The one which is sometimes used for this purpose, Luke 21. 36, doubtless refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and not to the final judgment. It is said that the famous passage, 2 Thessalonians 2. 7, 8, suggests that the entire time of "The Tribulation" is between the hour when Christ comes in the air for his saints and the hour of his return to the earth with them. To some minds this is probably the case. But to a careful student of the Bible, who has no theory to advance, it is difficult to discern how this passage hints at such a conclusion.

We have in this disposition to invent, fabricate, or mutilate, in the process of interpreting the Scriptures, an illustration of the fact that in treating with premillennialists we

must allow them one of three options to explain their methods of exegesis:

First. They deliberately handle the word of God deceitfully, making texts conform to a preconceived theory entirely apart from their obvious meaning. This is an accusation which we do not care to bring, because it is too terrible an indictment to place against any sincere followers of Christ.

Second. Ignorance of the manner in which the Bible has been produced, or an utter disregard of any human elements in its structure, an attitude which can be taken only by people who are deficient in education.

Third. The determination to hold, in spite of its manifest inconsistencies, the theory of the verbal dictation of the Scriptures, from the first syllable to the last. It is difficult to understand how educated persons can adhere to this theory; but, as some of them do, we can only set it down to that strange perversity which even intellectual culture cannot overcome, and under the influence of which men in all ages have accepted doctrines which seem irrational to the majority of pious and thoughtful men.

CHAPTER XI

PROPHECY AND THE SECOND ADVENT

It is recorded of Marcus Aurelius that he said, "Hope not for the Republic of Plato, but be content with ever so small an advance, and look on even that as a gain worth having." A similar opinion is held by many Christians respecting the old Hebrew prophecies of the final triumph of righteousness. They think it unwise to look for the fulfillment of these forecasts. With this sentiment we cannot agree, but confidently expect that in due time the sublimest anticipations of the seers will become facts of history.

The doctrine of the millennium, in the form it has taken since the Apocalypse of John was written, has no place in the Old Testament. The ancient prophets predicted a final state of blessedness, which they sometimes described as introduced by Jehovah,[1] and at other times as brought in by the advent of the Messiah.[2] This era was always at the outermost range of their vision, which occasionally seemed to rest in the immediate future, while now and

[1] Isaiah 40. 9–11; 52. 7–12.

[2] Isaiah 9. 6; Zechariah 9. 9, 10.

again it stretched away an immeasurable distance, merging into eternity.

As was perfectly natural, what they foretold was bound up with the destiny of Israel, and at first the horizon of the prophets was rimmed by the future history of their own people. But gradually they came to realize that the Jews were to become something grander than masters of the world; they were to be ministers of grace to the nations of the earth.[3] This sublime conception was not shared by the people as a whole; it was possessed by only the most enlightened of their prophets.

Judgment upon Israel when unfaithful to Jehovah, and upon all nations who refused obedience to him, would of necessity play a large part in the messages of the old prophets. They were practical men, and they handled plainly and without apology the common interests of the people and the solemn responsibilities of their leaders. They often clothed their messages in highly wrought apocalyptic speech. Their denunciations of wrong will be needed until the world has been cured of its iniquities. But to say their words are to be taken as literal predictions of what will hap-

[3] Isaiah 42. 1–4, 6, 7; 45. 22, 23; 60. Zephaniah 2. 11. Haggai 2. 6, 7.

pen at the end of the gospel dispensation is a misuse of the Scriptures.

What Is Prophecy?

The modern premillennialist takes his stand on the old, but now discredited, doctrine that "prophecy is nothing but the history of events before they come to pass."[4] He almost wholly neglects the ethical and spiritual elements of the prophetic messages. In his zeal for the literal fulfillment of predictions in their finest details, he apparently forgets that the prophet was first of all a preacher of righteousness, speaking primarily to his own age the truth which Jehovah gave him to utter.[5] He felt that compulsion was laid upon him.[6] Many of the greater prophets were writers as well as preachers, and their prophecies read in certain parts like editorials on social, civic, and national problems. They were statesmen, dealing with all public questions from the standpoint of moral and religious principles. Their true positions cannot be understood until we recognize these facts.[7]

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[4] Butler's Analogy, Part II, Chapter VII, Section 19.

[5] Jeremiah 1. 9; Ezekiel 3. 27; Amos 7. 14, 15.

[6] Jeremiah 20. 9; Ezekiel 2. 3; Revelation 1. 11.

[7] There was no element of prediction in the prophesying described in Exodus 7. 1; Numbers 11. 24–29; 1 Chronicles 25. 1; 2 Chronicles 15. 8; Proverbs 30. 1; Ezekiel 37. 9; and other similar passages.

But while the forecasting of future events is by no means the whole of prophecy, it is one of its most characteristic features. This the prophets themselves affirm.[8] They name their ability to make true predictions the real test of their authority.[9] Yet they never predict for the mere purpose of exciting amazement. They always have some great moral end to serve. Their forecasts are bound up with spiritual teaching. If this fact were kept in mind, it would save the student of the Bible from exaggerating the importance of prediction in the scheme of religion. The fulfillment of prophetic announcements without doubt awakens reverence for the Scriptures, and gives solid ground for belief in their authenticity. But the moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible would be precisely what they are if there were not one line of prediction in the whole volume. We do not question the supernatural quality of the Old Testament forecasts. They are among the most impressive marvels of divine inspiration. But it is easy to place the wrong emphasis upon them.

Prophecy was never intended to be an almanac of the centuries, a dream-book for the telling of fortunes, an ingenious puzzle

[8] Isaiah 48. 3–7.

[9] Deuteronomy 18. 18–22.

which history will solve, a labyrinth the clue to which must be sought through patient study, a veiled intimation of scientific discoveries and mechanical inventions. Yet many persons are eager to detect in the happenings of the day fulfillments of ancient prophecies, and profess to find automobiles and aeroplanes, liquid fire and poison-bombs, in the imagery of the ancient seers. They thus unite a freakish imagination with a thoroughly unwholesome idea of the purpose of Scripture. He who interprets prophecy after this fashion really makes himself the rival of the true prophet, and brings prediction into disrepute. Almost without number are the unfulfilled forecasts which well-meaning but misguided enthusiasts have based upon the Bible. Genuine prophecy will surely be justified by events, but the silly glosses of many modern interpreters are equally certain of discredit.[10]

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[10] When the Russo-Japanese War was being fought out a celebrated premillennialist preached a series of sermons in which he proved to his own satisfaction and to that of his auditors, from a comparison of names and other data in the ancient prophets, that it was foreordained that Russia should win the war and extend her influence over the whole empire of Japan. The event did not justify the prediction, but probably this did not at all embarrass the man who made the forecast. At this very moment men are writing in the periodical press to prove that words found in Ezekiel bear immediately upon the Russian problem. Others are showing that Babylon, not having been

In this connection it should be noted that many of the predictions of Hebrew prophecy are conditional—they are only to be fulfilled if the reasons continue which caused them to be proclaimed.[11] This suggests that many circumstances which are said to be connected with the return of our Lord, as is indicated by the predictions of the apostles, may also be dependent upon the course of history and the conduct of human beings.

A large proportion of Old Testament predictions, however, are unconditional. They are direct and unqualified announcements that certain things will come to pass, and it is matter of record that they did occur exactly as they were foretold. These run all the way

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entirely destroyed, according to prophecy, is as an outcome of this war to be rebuilt, then to become a more flourishing empire than in the days of its former splendor, and finally to be destroyed again forever in order that the exact lines of prophecy may be perfectly fulfilled.

[11] Jonah's prediction concerning Nineveh is an excellent illustration of this truth. We have also the express statement of Jehovah's attitude in this matter: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if they do that which is evil in my sight, that they obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them" (Jeremiah 18. 7–10. Compare Jeremiah 26. 12, 13, 17–19).

from the experiences of individuals and minor events in history to the vast downfall of nations.[12]

Another significant fact about Old Testament prediction is that the nearer the prophet stands to the events he is foretelling, the more definite are his terms of description; while in his forecasts of remote events, particularly those referring to the triumph of God's kingdom, his language becomes more general and vague, and abounds in poetic imagery. This is a very important truth to remember when one tries to interpret prophecy.[13]

The prophecies which concern us most are those relating to the Messiah. These follow a well-defined course. Having described the overthrow of Israel and Judah, after which

[12] Illustrations of these forecasts may be found in the announcement that fifteen years had been added to Hezekiah's life (Isaiah 38. 5), in the predictions of Hananiah's death within a year (Jeremiah 28), the destruction of Sennacherib's army (Isaiah 38. 33–35), the fate of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 22. 18, 19; 38. 14–23). Predictions of the downfall of the nations are found in Isaiah 6. 11–13; Jeremiah 25. 11, 12; Amos 5. 2; Micah 3. 12; 4. 10; and elsewhere. Amos and Hosea foretell the ruin of the northern kingdom, Micah and Hosea the Assyrian invasion, Jeremiah the supremacy of the Chaldeans and the overthrow of Judah. What is remarkable about these predictions is that in several instances, as, for example, in Amos and Isaiah, the conditions which prevailed at the moment the propehcy was uttered were in no sense calculated to suggest the doleful event which the prophet foretold. Other specific predictions abound in the old prophets concerning Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh, etc.

[13] See pp. 280, 281.

the restoration of the kingdom of God is predicted, the prophets go on to herald the glories of a world redeemed by the Messiah and the final happiness of saved humanity. A remarkable fact connected with these prophecies is the rapidity with which these epochs are assumed to succeed one another, the restoration of the kingdom of God and the establishment of the period of universal peace and righteousness appearing quickly to follow the great catastrophe. It would seem that the eagerness with which the prophet looked forward to the day of final salvation brought the consciousness of the triumph so vividly to him that in writing he ignored considerations of time.

Premillennial Peculiarities

By far the larger bulk of Messianic prophecy is taken by premillennialists to predict the second advent of Christ. Several peculiarities in this process should be noticed. First, wherever a passage speaks in the most general way of the approach of Jehovah to his people it is appropriated as a prediction of the second coming of our Lord, unless it unmistakably signifies the first advent of the Messiah. Yet many of the passages thus interpreted can mean nothing more than that God is spirit-

ually drawing near to men.[14] Indeed, the premillennialist is still more arbitrary than this, for many passages commonly assigned by scholars to the first advent of Christ are applied by him to the second coming, for apparently no better reason than that they serve to strengthen his theory.[15]

The second peculiarity of the premillennialist with reference to Messianic prophecy is his unwillingness to admit that predictions of the triumph of the kingdom of God are in process of being fulfilled as history moves on to its final goal. Consequently, he assigns all the prophecies of Messianic conquest to a period following the second advent, though there is nothing in the terms of these predictions to forbid our applying them to periods preceding the second coming of our Lord. However, the premillennialist will have it that the Christ must appear in bodily presence on the earth to make his kingdom come. The prophets did not say this. Our Lord's words, as we have seen, suggest a long and continuous course for his kingdom before his return. Who told the

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[14] Passages used after this fashion are: Deuteronomy 33. 2; Psalms 102. 16; Isaiah 40. 9–11; 52. 7–12.

[15] Among such passages are: Genesis 49. 14; Numbers 24. 17; Job 19. 25; etc. The idea that the Messiah would make two advents to this world probably never dawned on the mind of an ancient Hebrew prophet.

premillennialist that these prophecies could not in large part be fulfilled before Christ's second advent, or that our Lord's coming again would not be at the climax of their fulfillment rather than in advance of it? If we read history aright we shall see that these predictions have been in process of fulfillment for nearly two millenniums. All they signify will some day come to pass, but there is no warrant in the Scriptures for saying that Christ must come back to earth to force them to happen.

There is probably no scriptural proclamation of Christ's ultimate victory which is not accepted as sure of fulfillment by all true Christians, though premillennialists speak as if they alone believed in these prophecies. The only difference is that they insist that Christ must return to make these predictions good. They seem to place no reliance on his spiritual influence in the world, though he distinctly said that his power would continue among men in increased demonstration after he had withdrawn bodily from the earth.[16] What right have premillennialists to ignore this sublime fact? Christ apparently pitched the whole destiny of his mission to mankind on the operation of spiritual forces not in the

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[16] Matthew 28. 18–20.

least dependent upon his physical presence in this world.[17] The prophets of old, it is admitted, draw pictures of material conquest in their Messianic predictions. But this is not to say that physical force is to be used in securing a spiritual triumph, or that the consequences of victory are to be chiefly shown in material conditions.[18] When Queen Victoria of England laid her whole life at the feet of Christ did she not as truly fall down before him as if she had knelt in the presence of a visible king seated upon an ivory throne? Are not prophecies of the final renewal of the world under the lordship of the Messiah being gradually fulfilled by the slow, steady, but certain swing of civilization toward the Saviour who

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[17] See Chapter VI, pp. 129–135.

[18] The premillennialist depends on the expenditure of physical force to accomplish such predictions as these:

"Yea, all kings shall fall down before him:
All nations shall serve him" (Psalm 72. 11. Compare Zechariah 14. 9).

"All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord;
And they shall glorify thy name" (Psalm 86. 9).

"Ask of me, and I will give *thee* the nations for thine inheritance,
And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalm 2. 8).

"Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9. 7).

promised eventually to draw all men to his cross?[19]

A third peculiarity of the premillennialist is that he makes a list of the predictions which he says were literally fulfilled at the period of Christ's first advent, and then gathers up all the rest of the predictions which he thinks refer to the triumph of the Messianic kingdom, and declares, "These prophecies have not yet been literally fulfilled. They are evidently not now in process of being literally fulfilled. They can only be so fulfilled when Christ returns to fulfill them himself." There are several indefensible assumptions here, but the one fundamental proposition is that all predictions must have literal fulfillment. This is at the bottom of all else that the premillennialist says about prophecy. By literal fulfillment he means that, no matter how pictorial or extravagant the language used by the prophet, the lines of his picture must be reproduced in history with exact, precise, undeviating fidelity to every least detail. This is a wrong conception of prophecy. It is unnecessary to a belief in the inspiration of the Bible, and, even if it were a true doctrine, it would not serve any high spiritual purpose.

It is at this point that an important distinc-

[19] John 12. 32.

tion should be made. We agree with all those who say that the prophecies are to be taken literally. When a prophet says Israel he means Israel, and when he speaks of Jerusalem and Judah and Zion he intends his words to be taken at their usual significance. When he mentions Edom and Egypt and Babylon and Moab he can only indicate the countries and peoples denoted by these names. It is foolish to substitute the church, the world, or any other designation, as though the former were symbols of the latter. We are involved in unending confusion if we try to allegorize his words.

But there is a great difference between saying that a prophecy is to be *interpreted* literally and saying that it is to be fulfilled literally. The prophet had a burden about Judah or Jerusalem because he lived in relationship to Judah or Jerusalem. He did not prophesy about New York or Petrograd, because the farthest stretch of his imagination and the profoundest reach of inspiration did not reveal to him that such places would ever exist. The structure of his prophecy was necessarily built out of the materials of his own day. Hence, when he talks about the restoration of the kingdom of God he thinks of it as a theocracy centralized in Palestine, with its capital in

Jerusalem. What else could he do? These conditions make the outer garment of his prophecy, but the clothing is not of great importance. It is the idea which is of supreme value. When a prophecy made seven hundred years before Christ, under circumstances of a certain character, is carried over to a period two thousand years after Christ, under circumstances of a totally different character, the idea must be retained, for that is the thing of chief value, but the investiture of the idea will necessarily be changed. Hence, while we may admit without reserve that the prophet meant literally what he said, we must also admit that under changed conditions the precise thing he described is impossible of realization. It is beyond doubt that Christ will conquer, that all kingdoms will be merged into his kingdom; but there is no necessity for believing that to make this kingdom prevail Christ must set up his throne in Jerusalem, and Palestine become the center of the world.

Furthermore, there are passages from the ancient prophets which are so manifestly figurative that one cannot understand a mind which would seek to make them anything else;[20] and it is well known to all scholars

[20] Psalm 72. 16; Isaiah 2. 2; Ezekiel 47; Amos 9. 13–15; Joel 3. 18.

that there are others which describe the fate of cities and nations in terms which have never been accurately fulfilled in the sense of precise and complete details.[21] It is idle to say they ever will be fulfilled in their exact form.

Prophecy and Apocalypse

One of the strangest performances of the premillennialist is his handling of the apocalyptic prophecies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah, and the book of Revelation, "the most prominent features of which," says a learned writer, "are the sudden and terrific appearance of the Deity to rescue his people in their extremity, and the immediate transformation of existing conditions for their benefit.[22] In times of great distress, when

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[21] Isaiah 13. 16–21; Zephaniah 2. 14; and elsewhere.

[22] The essential teaching of the apocalypses is practically that of other prophecies, namely, that God will overthrow iniquity and establish righteousness, but the contrasts of judgment and salvation are more sharply drawn, and the forms employed are quite different. Paul recognizes, though he does not define, the distinction between ordinary prophecy and apocalypse (1 Corinthians 14. 6). While prophecy in general is a species of preaching, in which lessons from the past, the moral needs of the present and expectations of the future are all involved, the apocalypse is more distinctly a vision, usually abounding in tragic elements, in which the prophet is vividly conscious of a spiritual exaltation which enables him to have a superior knowledge of God's plans for the ages and for the whole world. The prophet expresses this heightened intelligence in symbolisms of his own choosing (p. 284, footnote 33). He selects those which appear to him best

the ordinary revelations of prophecy have ceased, men arise who frame their prophecies in pictorial language and with dramatic intensity. They people the world with grotesque figures. They uncover the abyss of the heavens. They handle things earthly and celestial with great daring. Impossibilities and incongruities abound. To expect these figures to be literally fulfilled is to depart entirely from the spirit in which they were employed. Yet this is exactly what the premillennialist insists on doing. He cannot believe that these apocalypses are to be treated as visions. Hence he laboriously seeks to identify all the kingdoms in the book of Daniel, though the important teaching of that book is that all kingdoms are to be absorbed into Christ's kingdom. He puzzles out every symbolism in the book of Revelation, though the vital teaching of that

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suited to convey to his own generation the revelations he has received from Jehovah.

Characteristic illustrations of apocalyptic prophecies are found in Isaiah 24 and 27; practically all of Ezekiel, chapters 1–32 being devoted to judgment and chapters 33 and 48 to rescue and redemption. Daniel 2. 31–45; 7; 8; 9. 24–27; 11. 2–12. 4; Joel 3. 9–21; Zechariah 14, and many other places. Even the historical books contain the apocalyptic element, for example, 1 Kings 22. 19–23. In the New Testament, in addition to Christ's apocalyptic discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) and the book of Revelation, we have an example of apocalyptic prediction in Paul's description of the overthrow of "the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2. 1–10).

work is that Christ is in process of defeating the devil.

An example of this method is found in the premillennialist's interpretation of Zechariah 14. He insists that this vision is to be literally fulfilled. We agree with him that it does not signify any symbolic conflict of the church and that it does not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A. D. 70, or to the assault upon the Holy City preceding the Babylonian captivity, or to any other event in the history of Israel. But we go still further and affirm that it does not forecast in detail any pivotal event of the future.[23] Un-

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[23] "Behold, a day of Jehovah cometh, when thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall Jehovah go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the mount of Olives shall be cleft in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south" (Zechariah 14. 1–4).

This is held by premillennialists to mean that after the Jews have been restored to Palestine, have rebuilt their temple, established ancient sacrifices, yielded to the Antichrist, suffered the terrible punishment known as "the time of Jacob's trouble," the Lord will suddenly come with his saints to take possession of the capital. They believe that every item of this prediction is to be literally fulfilled, laying special emphasis on the cleaving of Mount Olivet when Christ shall descend upon it from the clouds.

doubtedly the prophet believed that the theocracy would be restored, that Jerusalem would be delivered from its enemies, and that a visible kingdom would be set up. He describes the destruction of those who attack Jerusalem, the personal deliverance executed by Jehovah, the perfect reconstruction of Palestine for the advantage of the Jews,[24] the leveling of the surrounding territory in order that Jerusalem may be elevated above all,[25] the terrible punishment which will be meted out to those who have fought against Jerusalem,[26] the swarm-

[24] "And it shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea; in summer and in winter shall it be. And Jehovah shall be King over all the earth. In that day shall Jehovah be one, and his name one" (Zechariah 14. 8, 9).

[25] "All the land shall be made like the Arabah, from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she shall be lifted up, and shall dwell in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananel unto the King's winepresses" (Zechariah 14. 10. Compare Isaiah 2. 2; Micah 4. 1).

[26] "And this shall be the plague wherewith Jehovah will smite all the peoples that have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from Jehovah shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor" (Zechariah 14. 12, 13).

Premillennialists rejoice in the literal interpretation of these verses, which they suppose signify the Armageddon referred to in Revelation 16. 16. Well may a premillennialist writer, who be-

ing of all nations to that city as the center of religious and civic authority,[27] and the final conquest of the world to righteousness, even to the complete sanctification of the common life of the people.[28] The geographical descriptions and historical allusions of this passage show that the prophet is making a picture out of the materials at hand.[29] The stream flowing both ways out of Jerusalem,[30] employment of the feast of tabernacles,[31] the reference to Egypt,[32] and other items show how the prophet was limited to the elements which others had used and which we perceive to be the common possession of all apocalyptic writers.[33] These lurid pictures attempt to portray the outcome of that age-long conflict between Jehovah and his enemies, in which divine intervention gives victory, of which there are many illustrations in the Bible,[34]

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lieves in the literal fulfillment of this passage, say, "Heaven save us from the carnage of that day!"

[27] Verse 16.

[28] "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLY UNTO JEHOVAH: and the pots in Jehovah's house shall be like the bowls before the altar" (Zechariah 14. 20).

[29] Zechariah 14. 4, 5, 10, 16.

[30] Joel 3. 18; Ezekiel 47. 1–12; Revelation 21. 1 to 22. 5.

[31] Verse 16. [32] Verse 18.

[33] Ezekiel borrows from Isaiah; Zechariah and Daniel use many of the same figures; nearly every symbolism in Revelation was taken by John from an Old Testament writer.

[34] Joshua 10. 8–14; Judges 7. 15–22; 1 Samuel 14. 19–23; 2 Chronicles 20. 15–23; and many others.

and which is to result in the final overthrow of iniquity and the firm establishment of the Messianic kingdom on the earth. But the literal fulfillment of these predictions in physical terms is not to be expected.[35]

Treatment similar to that given this passage is insisted upon with regard to all apocalyptic sections by premillennialists. The book of Daniel is particularly esteemed by them as a treasury of specific predictions bearing on the millennium and the second advent which must, in their view, be fulfilled in the exact form in which they are written. Persons who believe this to be the true way of applying such Scripture will not be convinced they are wrong by any argument, and the attempt to set them right is futile.

Jesus made little use of such apocalyptic language as the ancient Hebrew prophets employed so abundantly. Both he and his apostles spoke of the destiny of the righteous more plentifully than of the fate of the wicked. They proclaimed a gospel of hope, not a coun-

[35] The introduction of automobiles and aeroplanes is rapidly giving to the horse a very inferior place in civilized countries. If Zechariah's prophecy were intended for literal fulfillment, the legend, "Holiness unto the Lord," should have been inscribed on some more modern article than "bells of the horses" in the prophet's vision. How childish it is to overlook the glorious spirit of this passage in the craze for the dry and meaningless letter!

sel of despair. The victory of the saints had larger bulk in their teachings than the defeat of sinners. They trusted the welfare of the kingdom to the working out of spiritual forces among men under the direction of the Lord of Hosts.

A Kingdom of Material Force

Against all this is the modern premillennialist. He has no expectation that Christ will win through the exercise of his spiritual authority and influence in the world. He believes that when our Lord returns to set up his regime of universal peace and righteousness he will bring it about by the use of forces akin to those employed by the temporal kings and potentates of this world. There is not a hint in his interpretation of the Scriptures that redeeming love and divine truth are the instruments by which Christ is to subdue the world to himself.

Furthermore, the reign of our Lord is described in terms which are distinctively material and physical. The throne of Christ is pictured in just such phraseology as would be used to portray the regal splendor of any earthly emperor. Associated with this central seat of royalty there are other thrones to be held by the saints who will share his

authority. Premillennialists are absolutely devoid of spiritual imagination. Their only conception of Christ's sovereignty is based on what they know of kings in the history of mankind. No one who has read premillennial literature can question the truthfulness of this statement. If premillennialists do in their inner thought project any spiritual ideas into their notion of Christ's future kingdom, they carefully avoid saying so in what they have written. One is left with the impression that they have a kind of lustful satisfaction in the thought that they are themselves to be rulers, conquerors, and glorious princes in the age to come.

Jesus said in the plainest terms: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."[36] He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world."[37] He affirmed, "The kingdom of God is within you."[38] But premillennialists say it is yet to come, and when it appears it will be a material kingdom. Because others, whom they call postmillennialists, believe that the kingdom of God is now expressing itself, though not completely, through the operations of Christianity, premillennialists say of them

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[36] Luke 17. 20.
[37] John 18. 36.
[38] Luke 17. 21.

that they exalt the church above Christ, while premillennialists exalt Christ instead of the church. This is as false as to charge postmillennialists with being atheists. They believe that only through Christ, whose spiritual leadership they reverence, can the world ever be conquered for righteousness. In a certain sense the postmillennialist is no millennialist at all. He looks for no segregated period of blessedness a thousand years in length. He does expect a gradual triumph of truth till the final conquest of Christ, and he is perfectly convinced that when Christ does return the sublimest prophecies of the Old Testament will be gloriously fulfilled.[39]

Disappointed Zealots

The Hebrew prophecies of the advent of the Messiah were not literally fulfilled in the way the Jews expected, and hence most of them rejected Christ when he appeared. Premillennialists call attention to this fact and say that it was not the divine plan to have all these predictions fulfilled during the first period of Christ's earthly life, but that when he comes again he will fulfill them to the last item. His second advent with material power is in their view absolutely necessary for this very pur-

[39] See Isaiah 2. 2–5; 11. 1–9; 35; 55; 60.

pose. But as the Jews rejected Christ at his first coming, so they say many Christians are now denying that a literal fulfillment of these aspects of Messianic prophecy should be expected, and such persons would be inclined to repudiate Christ if he came in that way.

There is a saner view than this, but it falls heavily upon the premillennialists. As the Jews were mistaken in interpreting the prophecies in literal terms, so the premillennialists may be equally wrong now in interpreting these prophecies with relation to the second coming of our Lord. There is every reason to assume that this is the case, since Christ invariably insisted on the spirituality of his kingdom. He refused, after certain of his great miracles, to allow royal honors to be bestowed upon him. He took every means to impress his disciples that he was not intending to set up a temporal kingdom. Even at the last day of his earthly ministry, just before his ascension, those disciples asked him when he was going to restore the kingdom unto Israel. They stupidly ignored all that he had said. They were so obsessed by the idea that he must establish a temporal kingdom that they could not put it out of their minds even in the sacred moment when he was bidding them farewell. Our Lord pro-

ceeded at once to tell them that they were on the wrong scent, and that they should have power enough when the Holy Spirit came upon them to indue them with energy to become witnesses for him in all parts of the earth.

Premillennialists are in much the same state. They cannot conceive it possible that Christ meant exactly what he said. They are sure, because they insist on a literal interpretation of the ancient prophecies, that our Lord must set up a physical throne and sway a material scepter over all nations of mankind. We know that our Lord predicted that he would come to judge the world, but we also know that he gave no promise of any such thing as the premillennialists claim. They are just as wrong to-day as the Jews were two thousand years ago; and if our Lord should return to the earth while they are living, they would be as far astray as were the Jews, including our Lord's disciples, because he failed at his first coming to do that which they confidently expected him to do.

Without Sweetness and Light

It is no extravagance to say that there never was a more pronounced type of predestination than that involved in the theory of the elect

gathered out of the world by the preaching of the gospel, including the complete restoration of Israel as a part of a program which arbitrarily picks a few persons from the whole population of the globe to constitute the bride of Christ. This is predestination in a new form, but it is of the old essence. There is a smack of fatalism in it. It provokes a smile to observe that all premillennialists take it for granted that they themselves are among the elect. They invariably speak of the time when "we" shall be caught up in the air to meet the Lord.

That believers constitute the body of Christ is a favorite thought with Paul, though he is the only New Testament writer who uses the metaphor. "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another."[40] "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ."[41] Paul says God has given Christ "to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all."[42] The figure used is the finest possible

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[40] Romans 12. 5. See also 1 Corinthians 10. 17.

[41] 1 Corinthians 12. 12.

[42] Ephesians 1. 23. See also Ephesians 4. 12; 5. 23–27; Colossians 1. 18; 2. 19; 3. 15.

illustration of diversity in unity. It is a very beautiful conception. But premillennialists, with their fatal disposition to take the poetry out of every symbolical idea, misuse this figure by pressing it to unreasonable lengths. They think of the body of Christ as in process of making, and say that when it is complete our Lord will return to take it. The only thing which inspires them to do missionary or evangelistic work is the thought that every true convert made is an addition to the body of Christ. Their melancholy conviction that the world is growing worse and the church is becoming feebler does not drive them to despair, because the body of Christ is not the church, but the elect which are called out of the church, finally to be separated entirely from it. They buoy up their spirits by the thought that the exact number of saints to finish the body of Christ may be reached any hour, and instantly the Lord will return. Of course, there is no justification for such a theory outside of their imagination. The body of Christ, the church, is not a mathematical quantity. It is an organism through which Christ has been expressing himself for centuries. The moment men begin to measure it they lose all power to understand it. Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. The narrow exclusive-

ness of extreme premillennialism is one of its worst faults.

In such a system there is no room for tenderness. The sweet and gentle spirit of Christ does not pervade the thought of the premillennialist. He forgets that the only class of persons Christ condemned in terms of unsparing denunciation were scribes and Pharisees who thought themselves good enough, and hence not in need of the repentance which Jesus preached or of the salvation which he came to provide. Against these avowedly righteous people, who looked with scorn upon their less pious fellow mortals, Jesus hurled his most pointed shafts of criticism. It might be well if premillennialists could remember this, both to safeguard themselves against the danger of Pharisaism and also to prevent them from looking with too great complacency on the awful destruction which they picture, and for which they feel themselves obliged to offer some kind of apology, lest their Lord seem to be a pitiless sovereign whose only purpose is to gain complete sovereignty over the earth at whatever cost. The Son of man views the lost world as an object of great solicitude and the wicked people of the earth as the victims of diabolical assault who ought to be rescued by every persuasive appeal which can be made

from the terrible consequences of their alienation from God. This is apparently not the feeling of the premillennialist. He is convinced that the vast majority of mankind living and dead will be swept into perdition. It is enough for him to look upon that destruction as inevitable and to thank God for his own deliverance and the deliverance of the other elect from the frightful tragedy. When he is told that such a view of God does the everlasting Father an injustice, and is calculated to make men still more rebellious against the divine authority, and thus increase the wickedness of the world, his reply is that death has been sweeping off the planet an entire world population every thirty-three years. He says the world is in the hands of the devil, who has the power of death, and that Satan has slain the world more than fifty times in the present dispensation. The inference is that very few of the uncounted millions who sleep in their graves have had any opportunity to be saved, the majority never having even heard of Christ. The argument is—if this is the case, why perplex your soul about additional millions? This is such a dismal, dark, and unchristian view of the good and great God that it is more likely to make infidels of men than to induce them to

turn from their sins to the Saviour of the world.

Jewish State and Hebrew Religion

Not only is premillennialism unspiritual and unchristian in the senses described in the foregoing pages, but it is also distinctively Jewish in all its characteristics. In the first place, there is no possibility of constructing such a millennium as is imagined without taking the traditional views held by the Hebrew people between the period when inspired prophecy closed and the period when Christ was born upon the earth. We have elsewhere sketched these views and need not here repeat them. But it is only by combining these with the famous passage in Revelation 20 that the premillennial theory could have been formulated.

It is perfectly natural that with such a view of the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies the premillennialists should look for the reestablishment of a distinctly Jewish kingdom under the sovereignty of the Messianic Prince. We find that many of this cult are actually looking not only for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, but the actual setting up again of the Hebrew state, accompanied with all the splendors and pomp of the days

of Solomon, and, indeed, a greater glory than existed in the golden era of his reign. They are counting on Jerusalem as the capital of the world, to which all nations shall bow in subserviency. They even predict the restoration of the Jewish religion with the ceremonial observance of its ritual worship. This is to be glorified and transfigured in some spiritual way; nevertheless it is to be a perpetuation on a loftier plane of that old covenant which Jesus Christ himself said he had come to annul and which the early apostles struggled so valiantly to remove from the thought of their Jewish converts. It is difficult to understand how people, reading the Acts of the Apostles, in which the contention with Judaizers and Hebrew spoilers of the gospel was so sharp and continuous, can dream that the thing which was so bitterly opposed in the first century should at last, under divine authority, be restored at the time of Christ's coming again to the earth.

It follows from all this that Christianity is not the final religion, as we have been taught to believe. Another is coming, a kind of glorified Judaism, to take its place. If the premillennialists looked forward to the time when the Christian religion, as we now understand it, should be developed into an even nobler

expression of the life of God in the souls of men, one might stretch himself out toward it as a blessed speculation, even if one thought it a visionary and unlikely thing. Christ intimated that there was much truth yet to be developed, and that the spirit of the Lord would lead believers into that truth, and the apostles who immediately followed him spoke in much the same strain. We may expect that Christianity has not attained its ultimate form, and so far would not find ourselves in disagreement with those who conceive a better institution than the organized Christianity of our day. But this is quite different from a return to an obsolete form of religion. Such a reaction would be contrary to all the principles of development. We always acknowledge our debt to Greece and Rome, to Assyria and Babylon, but we do not feel that we are making any advance if we return to forms of civilization or expressions of religion which have their source and significance in an ancient civilization. To assume that Divine Providence gave to us in the history of the Hebrew people the norm of ultimate national and religious life is not only without foundation in the Scriptures, but is also foreign to any rational conception of the meaning of history, and the slow but steady development

of human institutions, to say nothing of the divine ideals which have been given to us by revelation.

Shall We Try to Save the World.

It is fatal to the whole scheme of the premillennialist that, having an unspiritual program, the advocates of this theory should not expect to have any profound influence in bettering the world. They do not regard it as their business to pervade society with wholesome and corrective influences. It is their function only to help gather out of the world the small body of the elect who shall be constituted the Bride of Christ. The only support they seem to have for such a theory is found in an incidental allusion to the prophecy of Amos in a speech made by James at the Council of Jerusalem, to which we have referred in detail elsewhere.[43] It does not offset the depressing effect of this theory to say that many premillennialists are devout people, interested in the work of foreign missions and the evangelization of their own country. However industriously they may pursue this work, and however sincerely they may seek to add to the body of Christ the few who are to be saved out of the great mass, the diffusion of

[43] Pp. 172–174; 326, 327.

the doctrine that the world is not to be saved until after it has once more been destroyed is certain to discourage the whole great effort of Christendom to raise the world out of darkness into light.

We may now sum up our objections to the extreme premillennial scheme as follows:

1. It is unscriptural, judged by any sound method of biblical interpretation, and is in hopeless conflict with passages from the Gospels and Epistles, the meaning of which is scarcely in dispute.[44]

2. It is artificial, being constructed of many unrelated passages taken arbitrarily from various parts of the Bible and cemented together by the ingenuity of men who take more delight in such feats of skill than in the exposition of spiritual truth.

3. It is unreasonable; that is, it runs contrary to the observed facts of history, the current life of Christendom, and the law of development which prevails everywhere in the universe as we know it.

4. It discredits the work of the Holy Spirit in the present dispensation of grace.[45]

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[44] See pp. 245–51.

[45] This premillennialists vehemently deny, but do not disprove; for they constantly declare that the main function of the Holy Spirit is to gather out of the world the elect, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lord. When this has been done Christ, they

5. It is Jewish rather than Christian.
6. It is materialistic rather than spiritual.
7. It is pessimistic rather than hopeful.
8. It is destructive, if consistently followed, of all social, civic, industrial, political, and moral reforms.

An artist and his wife came back from Paris a few months after their marriage to look for a place in New York where they could start housekeeping. They were not satisfied with an apartment. They desired a home of their own. They found a building which had once been a stable and was at that time being used as a factory and storeroom. This they leased, removed its rubbish and built in partitions, stairways, windows, doors, fireplaces, and other improvements. They beautified the windows and doors with some stained glass remnants which had been left in the old building, and soon had one of the cosiest and most artistic homes in the whole city. It was their spirit which transformed the stable into a delightful dwelling place. So it is that the life of God in the soul of man will transfigure any environment. The Christian religion is doing that for the world. Little by little it

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say, will return to finish the work which the Holy Spirit is not qualified to perform, that is, the bringing in of righteousness and peace upon the whole earth.

drives out ugliness and discord, and puts in beauty and harmony. The old Hebrew prophets looked for no setback in the program of general deliverance and development. They plainly expected that the movement of the centuries would proceed until the world was redeemed, even physical nature being transformed and human society reshaped until universal peace and righteousness should prevail. This hope they transmitted to subsequent generations. Christ came to certify the correctness of their expectations, to intensify the longing of humanity for the fulfillment of their prophecies, and to put into operation forces which in the fullness of time will bring to pass all that was predicted.

CHAPTER XII

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"We are fallen among the enemy and are lost!" cried some Greek troops of the olden time to their commander, as they saw his army entirely surrounded and attacked from every side.

"How are we fallen among the enemy any more than the enemy is fallen among us?" replied the general.

Such is the militant spirit of those Christians who refuse to be stricken with panic on account of the turbulence of our times, by which less valorous souls are provoked to despair, or led to conclude that the Christian dispensation is about to come to an inglorious end, or to confess that Christian civilization has gone into permanent bankruptcy.

All over our country and in foreign parts men are pointing to the world war as an unmistakable sign of the end of the age and a clear intimation that the return of Christ to judge the world is near. But every war has been taken by some persons as a fulfillment of prophecy since the day in which Jesus said:

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: *for these things* must needs come to pass; and the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail." [1] Many are now saying that the present war is the conflict which marks the end of the age. Some predicted that it would cease on February 1, 1918, basing their confidence on passages which any intelligent student of the Bible ought to know cannot refer to this struggle.[2] An evangelist gained notoriety and endangered his personal safety by declaring it to be folly for the young men of the United States to enter the army, because the world would come to an end before the war itself was finished. Many are regarding the present conflict as the Armageddon referred to by the writer of the Apocalypse.[3] Old Testament prophecies not less than New Testament forecasts have been made to signify the terrible catastrophe now devastating Europe.

Now, the prophets of the Old Testament in

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[1] Matthew 24. 6–8. Compare Mark 13. 7, 8; Luke 24. 9–11.
[2] Daniel 7. 25; 12. 7; Revelation 11. 2, 3; 12. 6, 14; 13. 5.
[3] Revelation 16. 16.

several instances predict wars, and that with some degree of particularity, and these predictions are connected with what is known as "the day of Jehovah," into the meaning of which designation we shall now inquire.

"The Day of the Lord"

The phrase "the day of Jehovah" is found so frequently in the old prophecies, and is used under circumstances of such a nature, that even a casual reader must be convinced that it has some deep significance.[4] It does not mean a date in the calendar, but, rather, the opening of an epoch in which an episode is frequently given as the point of departure. The phrase is first met in the prophecy of Amos, who flourished about B. C. 760. "Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! Wherefore would ye have the day of Jehovah? It is darkness, and not light. As if a man did

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[4] Isaiah 2. 12; 13. 6, 9, 13.
Jeremiah 46. 10.
Ezekiel 13. 5; 30. 3.
Joel 1. 15; 2. 1, 2, 11, 31; 3. 14.
Amos 5. 18–20.
Obadiah 15.
Zephaniah 1. 7, 14.
Zechariah 14. 1.
Malachi 3. 2.
Equivalent phrases, descriptive in character, are also found. See Isaiah 34. 8; 61. 2; Jeremiah 30. 7; Ezekiel 7. 19; Lamentations 2. 22; Zephaniah 2. 2, 3; Malachi 4. 5.

flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" [5] It is clear that in this passage Amos refers to the day of judgment upon Israel, which he speaks of as if it were immediately at hand. Assyria is doubtless the power by which divine justice is to be meted out, though it is not named.

In this earliest use of the phrase we have the key to its primary meaning, and an examination of the numerous passages in which it occurs will show that this meaning is carried down through all the later prophets. It always signifies a time of judgment in which righteousness will triumph. But a difference in the objects of divine punishment must be noted. Though the earliest conceptions of the Hebrews may have carried chiefly the idea of punishment for the enemies of Israel, it is very clear that with those prophets whose messages were committed to writing the proclamation of judgment referred primarily to Israel, though it might by implication embrace other nations.[6] Among the prophets next in order of time punishment for the enemies of the

[5] Amos 5. 18–20.

[6] Amos 2. 1–3; 3. 9–15; Hosea 4. 1–6; Zephaniah 3. 1–13.

Hebrew nation was definitely pronounced,[7] while among the latest prophets the predictions included the punishment of the whole wicked world.[8] The character of "the day of Jehovah" is shown by the terms of description used. It is Joel who cries, "Alas, the day of Jehovah," and again, "the great and the terrible day." [9] Jeremiah calls it "the time of Jacob's trouble." [10] Zephaniah and others describe it as being attended by convulsions in nature.[11]

It must be noticed also that the predictions of judgment are usually based on some current national calamity or on one which the prophets saw in the immediate foreground of their times. Amos is dealing with the judgment which is to come upon Israel through the assaults of her enemies.[12] Joel draws a wonderfully graphic picture of the plague of locusts sweeping over the land, and proceeds to summon the Jews to repentance and devotion to God for the purpose of beating back their enemies.[13] Isaiah arraigns the king of

[7] Haggai 2. 22; Zechariah 1 to 8.

[8] Daniel 7. 21–27; Malachi 3. 2–15.

[9] Joel 1. 15; 2. 31.

[10] Jeremiah 30. 7.

[11] Zephaniah 1. 14–16; Isaiah 13. 10; 34. 4; Ezekiel 32. 7, 8; Amos 9. 13; Joel 2. 30, 31.

[12] Amos 5 to 7.

[13] Joel 2. 3–11.

Babylon and predicts the overthrow of his empire.[14]

But while these proclamations of "the day of Jehovah" take their origin in current events and prospective disasters, yet the prophets look forward to the day of final judgment. Usually they seem to think this will at once follow the calamity which they see at hand, but as thousands of years have swept away since these prophecies were delivered and the final judgment did not follow these events or any others of like character which have since occurred, it is inevitable that we should extend these prophecies to a point yet distant. Hence, "the day of Jehovah," as used in the Old Testament Scriptures, may be interpreted as having this double significance: It is the final judgment and it is also every other day of judgment, from the age in which a particular prophecy was written down to the final day of judgment, whenever it may appear.

But "the day of Jehovah" was not only the day of judgment. It was also the day of deliverance. In the popular mind it meant the day when Jehovah would interpose in behalf of his people to deliver them from both internal and external miseries. While the first purpose of "the day of Jehovah" was to clear away the

[14] Isaiah 13. 6–22.

sins of Israel and then to punish the foes of God's people, it was also for the purpose of redeeming Israel from destruction. Hence, it became a day of rejoicing.[15] It is very important to keep in mind that "the day of Jehovah" is both a time of terror for evildoers and also a time of great joy for the righteous.

When we come down to the New Testament times we find the phrase is still used, but the Christian writers have somewhat altered its form. It is no longer "the day of Jehovah," but "the day of the Lord," "the day of Christ," "the day of Jesus Christ," "the day of our Lord Jesus," "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." This new phrasing is much used by Paul and at least once by Peter.[16] An examination of these passages will show that the expressions mean the time of Christ's return, and they convey the same ideas that are found in the Old Testament prophecies. Just as ancient Israel looked forward to "the day of Jehovah" as a time when God would punish the wicked and rescue the righteous, so these Christians looked

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[15] Habakkuk 3; Obadiah 17–21.

[16] 1 Corinthians 1. 8; 5. 5.
2 Corinthians 1. 14.
Philippians 1. 6, 10; 2. 16.
1 Thessalonians 5. 2.
2 Thessalonians 2. 2.
2 Peter 3. 10.

forward to Christ's return as a time when he would judge the world and save the faithful.

These ideas are retained by the Christians of our day. Just as the old prophets saw "the day of Jehovah" in the calamities which overtook the world, so ever since Christ left the earth many persons have fancied they saw "the day of the Lord" or "the day of Christ" in the catastrophes of their time. It is common for men to say when any great distress, like famine, or earthquake, or terrible war occurs, that perhaps the end of the world or the day of judgment is approaching. Whatever one may think of the wisdom or folly of such utterances, they at least show that the conviction is native to the souls of men that a day of judgment is impending. What is greatly to be desired is that they shall also realize that "the day of Christ," that is, the time of his return to the earth, will be a time of redemption, of deliverance, of salvation, and hence, a time of great rejoicing, the brightness of which for the righteous will far surpass any gloom which it may have for the impenitent.

"The Great Tribulation"

Have we reached "the day of Jehovah," the beginning of God's final judgment on the nations? Many persons are affirming this. They

declare that we are now in the last phase of human history and of the Gospel dispensation, and that this war is a clear evidence of this fact. The reasons given for this conviction are many and various, and to these we now give attention. Those who hold that this is the beginning of "the day of Jehovah" argue first from the fact that this is the most colossal war the world has ever known. Never before were so many millions of men under arms, so many killed in battles, or so many confined in prisons and in hospitals. Never were such vast sums of money expended upon warfare, or so many nations involved at one time in martial encounters. Never were the atrocities of war so horribly displayed. Some who view these conditions with their minds upon the prophecies declare that the end of the age is at hand. Certain passages of Scripture are used to confirm this opinion, and these may be appropriately grouped together before their significance is examined:

"Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." [17]

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of

[17] Jeremiah 30. 7. Compare Zephaniah 1. 15–18.

trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." [18]

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." [19]

"These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." [20]

The last of these passages is held by some students of the Bible to designate the saints who still survive the ordeal, worse than the world has ever known, referred to in the preceding passages. This "great tribulation" is set down for the end of the gospel age, and, since these are the most troublous times the world has ever known, it is claimed that we must now be entering the final period of judgment on the nations.

It must be remembered, however, that though the prophets in making their forecasts projected their thought far over the long fu-

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[18] Daniel 12. 1.

[19] Matthew 24. 21, 22. Compare Mark 13. 19, 20.

[20] Revelation 7. 14.

ture, yet the form of their predictions was invariably suggested by something in the immediate foreground of their times. This is the case in each of the instances just quoted.

Jeremiah, for example, is speaking primarily of the fall of Babylon, which he describes as affecting even the people of Israel, as was indeed the case. The phrase "that day" refers, of course, to "the day of Jehovah," and the passage can only mean that the visitation of judgment shall be one of distress even to Jacob, not that the whole weight of the disaster shall fall upon the people of Israel.

Daniel's vision primarily refers to the period of Antiochus Epiphanes, who persecuted the Jews in the second century before Christ. In the seventh and eleventh chapters of the book of Daniel we have a description of the character and reign of the tyrant. At the beginning of the twelfth chapter we have a prediction of the terrible disaster to Palestine accompanying it. History has confirmed it all.[21] But

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[21] "It was after completing his conquest of Egypt that Antiochus, in pursuit at once of his political and religious ambition, seized upon Jerusalem. The terrified population fled before him. They were hewn down in the streets; they were pursued to the roofs of their houses. But that which even more than this widespread massacre thrilled the city with consternation was the sight of the king, in all the pomp of royalty, led by the apostate Menelaus into the sanctuary itself. . . . With characteristic rapacity he laid hands on the sacred furniture which the wealthy

beyond the fall of Antiochus the prophet saw the coming of the Messiah and the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth. This he apparently believed would come immediately after the overthrow of the despot. But the perspective of his picture was too much foreshortened, as we now know.

In our Lord's prediction on the Mount of Olives at the close of his public ministry he primarily referred to the destruction of Je-

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Babylonian Jews had contributed through the hands of Ezra—the golden altar of incense, the golden candlestick, the table of consecrated bread, and all the lesser ornaments and utensils. . . . The walls that Nehemiah had built with so much care were dismantled; the houses in their neighborhood were burnt; another massacre and another captivity followed. The blood ran through the streets and even in the Temple courts. . . . In every town and village of the country were erected altars, at which the inhabitants were compelled to offer sacrifices in the heathen form, and on the king's birthday to join in the sacrificial feast. . . . And at last the crowning misery of all, which sent a shock through the whole community, was the deliberate desecration of the Temple, not only by adapting it to Grecian worship, but by every species of outrage and dishonor. . . . Its smooth and well-kept courts were left to be overgrown by rank vegetation, in the shelter of which, as in the groves of Daphne, the licentious rites of Antioch were carried on. . . . The profanation was consummated by introducing a herd of swine and slaughtering them in the sacred precincts. One huge sow was chosen from the rest. Her blood was poured on the altar before the Temple and on the Holy of Holies within. A mess of broth was prepared from the flesh and sprinkled on the copies of the Law. This was the 'abomination of desolation'—the horror which made the whole place a desert. From that moment the daily offerings ceased, the perpetual light of the great candlestick was extinguished—the faithful Israelites fled from the precincts" (Stanley, History of the Jewish Church, vol. iii, pp. 326–331).

rusalem. That is what his disciples who reported his discourse believed, and we know that the event which he foretold a whole generation before it occurred was attended by the most frightful sufferings.[22] Surely, this was such a time of trouble as had not been hitherto experienced. Those who listened to Christ's discourse believed that it would be followed by his return to judge the world. This did not occur, and again the prediction was in the thought of men extended to reach the day of final judgment, however remote that might be.

As for "the great tribulation" mentioned by the apostle John, it is generally admitted that this catastrophe was fittingly symbolized by the persecutions of the Christians in the Roman Empire under Nero, or possibly under Domitian. These sufferings have been so frequently described by historians that they require no description here.[23] Surely, this was a period of distress so terrible that nothing equal to it had hitherto visited the world. But we now know that it was not the final catastrophe which was to precede the return of Christ to judgment.

At present we are in a war which all agree

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[22] See pages 62–64.

[23] Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. ii, chap. xvi, or any authentic history of Rome.

is in many of its aspects the most terrible humanity has ever known. But we must be cautious in assuming that it marks the end of the age. Remembering that the overthrow of Babylon with the restoration of the Jews to Palestine and the frightfulness and failure of the reign of Antiochus did not mean that the final judgment was at hand; that the destruction of Jerusalem did not mean that the return of Christ to the earth would be immediate; that the persecutions under Nero did not mean the end of the Christian dispensation, we should be hesitant to declare that we have now attained the hour of supreme trial. This is the most colossal war in history, but we do not know that it is the superlative degree of iniquity. We cannot say with certainty that more terrible wars will not break out in the future. It seemed impossible to many that this one should occur, but it has happened. This fact should teach us to avoid saying that anything worse is impossible.

Misapplications of Scripture

But it is affirmed that there are other current conditions which conform to lines of prophecy. The following passage is quoted as applying to our times: "When they are saying Peace and safety, then sudden destruc-

tion cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape." [24] Attention is called to the fact that this exactly describes the condition which prevailed at the outbreak of this war. For many years preceding it strong efforts had been made for the establishment of peace. The Hague Tribunal had been in operation for some time. Peace conferences of various sorts had been held. A peace palace had been erected, and at the very moment of the outbreak of the war a peace congress was gathering at Constance. At the instant of sudden alarm men were calculating upon international peace as though it were in their possession. So accurately did this Scripture have its fulfillment.

This is not quite a fair statement, since the peace congresses were not for the celebration of a peace which men fondly dreamed was in existence, but for the purpose of preventing, if possible, what observant people clearly saw was impending. For no less than a quarter of a century men had predicted that, since Europe was an armed camp, it was only a question of time when hostilities would break out in great fury.[25] It is true that many people

[24] 1 Thessalonians 5. 3.

[25] According to newspaper reports in January, 1889, more than twenty-five years before the outbreak of actual hostilities, Lord Wolseley said: "Those who study the map of Europe must be-

in England and America ridiculed the possibility of war. But it is also true that many judicious persons were admonishing the English and American people that they were resting in a false security.

A similar condition of things prevailed in the United States preceding the Civil War. William H. Seward had said, what many thoughtful people believed, that the contest with slavery was an "irrepressible conflict." But easy-going persons were inclined to hush the spirit of alarm, and even when the firing upon Fort Sumter made certain that the hour of conflict was at hand there were short-sighted persons who were saying that it was but a flurry and would be over in thirty days.

Similar conditions have existed many times in the history of nations, and in each instance the passage we are considering might have been applied with equal appropriateness. It is one of those general statements which can be applied to a great variety of events, but which, in the place where Paul used it, had a specific application to the second coming of our Lord. The apostle recalled the words uttered by

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lieve that there is hanging over us a warcloud greater than any which has hung over Europe before. It means when it bursts—and burst it surely will, as surely as the sun shines to-morrow—it means a war of extinction, of devastation between great armed nations whose populations are armed and trained to fight."

Jesus concerning the suddenness and unexpectedness of his return.[26]

Another passage of Scripture which it is claimed was written to characterize the present crisis is taken from the Book of Daniel, and reads: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." [27] This war occurs at a time of unexampled intercourse between the populations of the globe through travel and of extraordinary intellectual activity. Is this a sign that the end of the age is at hand and that Christ's return is near?

The situation is well understood by all who have their eyes open. The old-fashioned stage-coach days are gone. Palatial trains of chariots, finer than any Cæsar ever saw, convey people over vast distances. Slow sailing ships, subject to the caprice of the winds, have been displaced by mighty steamships that are defiant of storm or calm, of wind or tide. In place of lumbering carriages we have automobiles that rush like comets, and instead of depending on the earth's surface for our plane of locomotion, we have aeroplanes that cover one hundred and fifty miles an hour. No increase in rapidity or method of travel aston-

[26] Matthew 24. 36–42.
Mark 13. 32–37.
Luke 21. 34–36.

[27] Daniel 12. 4.

ishes us. We should not be amazed if vehicles were invented to-morrow which would in turn run on the earth, swim in the sea, or sweep through the air, with equal facility, and in immediate response to the will of the pilot. Soon no place on the globe will be free from the peering eyes of those who run to and fro in the earth.

As to the diffusion of knowledge, we know that learning is no longer tediously transmitted by a few manuscripts passed from hand to hand. Books are multiplied by millions. No longer does the schoolmaster gather little groups about him for instruction, but great educational systems with millions of students and innumerable institutions of higher learning furnish opportunity for acquisitions unknown to any previous age. No longer are the events of narrow circles of men reported by slow processes from one individual to another, but each morning the happenings of the world are displayed on every breakfast table by means of the daily press. We have harnessed the forces of nature, learned the secrets of the sky, and made ourselves the masters God intended us to be, and the end is not yet.[28]

It is held by some that these very facts indicate that the end of the age is drawing

[28] Psalm 8. 6–9.

nigh. But certain qualifying statements need to be made. The passage itself will bear a different rendering than is usually given to it. Some scholars insist that the words are not properly translated in our English versions. They claim that what is meant, if the original is accurately rendered, is that in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, of which Daniel is undoubtedly speaking, many will go searching through the book he has written to ascertain how God's great purposes for his kingdom will be secured. If this is the correct interpretation, then this passage does not apply in the manner claimed.

But whatever may be the immediate reference, even if we agree that its ordinary rendering is adequate, it still could be applied to many other epochs in the world's history when travel increased and knowledge was multiplied. Take a single example—the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Crusaders, who in previous centuries had gone out to wrest the sepulcher of Christ from the Turks, had gradually increased the interest of Europe in lands that were distant. Commerce had been extended to the East. Ships were gradually improved. The mariner's compass had been discovered, and by its aid longer voyages could

be taken. The invention of gunpowder had changed the character of war. The Moors had been driven out of Spain. Great explorations occurred during the period to which we refer. Columbus had sailed to the western world. Spain had conquered Mexico and Peru. The Portuguese had settled in Brazil. Sebastian Cabot had sailed from England to America. DaGama had doubled the Cape of Good Hope. Ferdinand Magellan had circumnavigated the globe. Swiftly men had run to and fro over the earth.

All this was accompanied by an unusual fermentation in the minds of men. Great things were being expected. With the fall of Constantinople there had occurred a revival of learning. Driven from the East, learned Jews and Greeks came to live in Italy. Greek and Hebrew were studied once more. The literature and art of Greece and Rome flourished. Poets, painters, sculptors, and historians sprang up. Above all, the invention of printing came just in time to float everywhere the new learning and the stirring ideas of men. Surely, knowledge was being increased in the earth.

What is more to the purpose is the fact that this increase of travel and of knowledge, which really betokened a new era in the history of

mankind, was held by many then to forecast the end of the age. The notion that Christ would return to judgment was widely prevalent. Even Martin Luther, "dreading lest the end of the world should arrive before he had translated the Bible, published the prophecies of Daniel separately," in order that these predictions might be before the minds of the people, saying that the book was "a work for these latter times.[29]

From these instances, and others which might be named, it seems evident that there is no more reason to say now than at any previous time that increased travel and knowledge point to the end of the age, nor can any man safely predict to what larger ranges, both of travel and knowledge, succeeding generations will attain.

The Restoration of the Jews

This war burst forth at a time when the Jews were showing a new interest in Palestine and were going in large numbers to the land of their ancestors. Now, the return of the Jews to the Holy Land is a subject of prophecy, and is by some regarded as an event connected with Christ's second advent. Is the present migration of Jews to Palestine a sign

[29] D'Aubigne, History of the Reformation, book xiv.

that Christ's return is near? Will this war, in which it is predicted the Turkish Empire will be dismembered, result in giving the control of Palestine to the Jews,[30] and, if so, will this occupation be the prophesied restoration, and will it foretoken the end of the age and the second advent of Christ? To answer these questions one needs to refer to the greatest of all prophets, Jesus of Nazareth. This is what he predicted in his Apocalyptic discourse concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment of the world: "And they shall

[30] Until the British occupation of Jerusalem in December, 1917, Palestine had been under Turkish rule, except for two short intervals, for more than twelve centuries. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century few Jews were allowed in Jerusalem, and these were confined to fixed localities. Fifty years ago these restrictions were removed, since which time, influenced by colonization schemes having the support of such men as Montefiore, Baron de Hirsch, and members of the Rothschild family, the Jewish residents in Palestine have increased to 100,000, or one sixth of the entire population, many of whom are in farm colonies of marked success. Twenty years ago began what is known as the Zionist Movement, under the inspiration of a pamphlet by Dr. Theodore R. Hertzl, in which he proposed that Palestine should be secured for an autonomous government of Jews, under the suzerainty of Turkey, and supported by guarantees of the great powers of Europe. Little satisfaction was obtained from the Sultan when he was approached on the subject of establishing a Jewish state. Even before the outbreak of the war, however, several European nations had become interested in the project. English statesmen like Viscount Bryce and A. J. Balfour have recently committed themselves to the policy of giving the Jews a national home in Palestine. A dream of many centuries seems likely to be realized, but the exact political future of the Holy Land probably cannot be determined till the close of the war.

fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." [31] The destruction of Jerusalem, occurring in A. D. 70, and resulting in the scattering of the Jews to various parts of the world, began the fulfillment of this prophecy. The city looked as if no one had ever lived there and was as completely destroyed as French and Belgian towns have been obliterated in the present war. Jerusalem was rebuilt, but without its glorious temple. Jews were allowed to live within its walls under protest, but through the centuries Jerusalem has been trodden under foot in turn by Romans, Syrians, Persians, Franks, Norsemen, and Turks. From the day this judgment began until this hour the Jews have been under subjection to foreign powers.

How long shall this subjection continue? "Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." When did these times begin, and when will they end? Some students of the Bible say that the phrase means the period during which the Gentiles—that is, the non-Jewish nations—continue in power over the Jews. This began, they declare, under Nebuchadnezzar, when Jerusalem was taken by siege and hosts of

[31] Luke 21. 24.

Jews were carried into captivity, about six hundred years before Christ. The period will end, it is said, when the Gentiles, or the non-Jewish nations, have all been destroyed, and when the Jews, after severe punishment, are made the center of a world-wide government of which Christ will be the supreme ruler.

That expectation is based in part on this prophecy: "Therefore, fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant, saith Jehovah; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo! I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished." [32] But this prophecy was spoken about the return from Babylonian captivity. It was fulfilled, and an end truly has not been made of Israel, but an end has been made of those nations which subdued and persecuted the Jews. Assyrians and Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks and Romans have vanished. The Turk is passing. But it is an unwarranted stretch of interpreta-

[32] Jeremiah 30. 10–11.

tion to make this prophecy declare that all the nations of the earth will be swept away.

There are two distinct phases of the period called "the times of the Gentiles": First, it is during this period that divine judgment is in process of execution upon the Jews by means of the other nations. We see how this discipline is being accomplished. The Jew has no home, yet he is everywhere. His people are not a nation, and yet they are in every nation. He is being persecuted on all sides, yet God is everywhere preserving him. This will go on until his apostasy ceases. Second, it is during this period that the Gentiles—that is, the non-Jewish nations—are availing themselves of the privileges of the Gospel which the Jews rejected; in other words, the time which will be required for the evangelization of the world; that is, the period running from the hour of the destruction of Jerusalem to the beginning of "the day of the Lord," when Christ will come again.

This is the period through which we are now passing. It covers all of the Christian centuries, all of the missionary efforts from the time of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted, to the great mass movement in India at the present hour, when whole villages and tribes are passing over to Christianity in a

body. How long this period will last no one can tell. But that it will continue until the world outside of Judaism, called the Gentiles, including all the pagan nations, has been evangelized is certain from the predictions of our Lord.

There is another prophecy of the New Testament which helps us to understand the meaning of this period. It is made by the apostle Paul, who says: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written,

> There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer;
> He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:
> And this is my covenant unto them,
> When I shall take away their sins." [33]

Here "the fullness of the Gentiles" means, of course, the great mass of the world's populations outside of Judaism. These are to be brought in before the Jews are won to Christ. The teaching is that the conversion of a majority of the Gentile world must take place before that of the Jews, as a whole, but no clue

[33] Romans 11. 25–27.

to the time when this will occur in either case is given.

There is still another passage which confirms this teaching.[34] A council is being held in the city of Jerusalem. James is speaking. He supports what Peter has just said about God visiting the Gentiles.[35] "to take out a people for his name." He then cites an old prophet as saying: "After this"—that is, after the taking out of the Gentiles a people for his name—

"I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen;
And I will build again the ruins thereof,
And I will set it up."

Here again it is taught that not until the Gentiles have been saved shall the Jews be brought in.

It was on the basis of this expectation that Paul turned from the Jews to the Gentiles, and went through the Roman Empire like a flaming torch. It is with this conviction that Christian evangelists have swept over land and sea. Their first business is to evangelize the world. Here and there a Jew is converted, but the number of such conversions is compara-

[34] Acts 15. 12–17. See pages 173, 174.

[35] Amos 9. 11, 12.

tively small. When the world at large is evangelized the Jew will come in.

The conversion of the Jews will be a remarkable event. It will give spiritual enrichment to the entire world. "For if the casting away of them *is* the reconciling of the world, what *shall* the receiving *of them be,* but life from the dead?" says Paul.[36] The world has greatly profited by the fact that the non-Jewish nations have had the blessings of Christianity offered to them in consequence of Judaism's delinquency. That advantage will be still further increased when the Jews come back, devoting their intellectual ability and their spiritual qualities to the religious development of mankind.

When "the times of the Gentiles" have been fulfilled, when "the fullness of the Gentiles" has come in—that is, when the period of judgment for the Jews has passed and when the Gentiles have been evangelized—will the Jews be restored to Palestine as an event connected with their conversion? That is a question to which Jesus never refers—a very striking fact. It is a thing on which Paul and the other apostles say nothing. Indeed, the whole New Testament is silent upon it. This is remarkable if the restoration of the Jews to the land

[36] Romans 11. 15.

of their ancestors is actually a part of the process of their conversion. Nevertheless, the old prophecies contained many predictions of the restoration of Israel. Some of these prophecies were written before the Jews were carried away to Babylon. Some of them were written during their exile. There are still others, however, which were delivered after the great Babylonian captivity. These must naturally refer to some other restoration, and as the Jews have not yet returned to Palestine, the fulfillment of these predictions is evidently an event of the future.

Yet there is a very important element in the prophecies of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine which must not be overlooked. If these predictions are carefully read it will be seen that they unite two things—the righteousness of the people and their return to the land—as though these were two phases of one event. Moreover, the order is, first, righteousness and faith, and then restoration to privilege and power.

The importance of the recent migration of the Jews may be overemphasized by some who seem to be anxious to fulfill prophecy more rapidly than the Lord appears to be. For example, a railway has been built from Joppa to Jerusalem, and some writers refer this to the

mighty chariots mentioned in Nahum 2. 3, while others confine the applications of this passage to motor cars. In each instance the interpretation is childish. One writer, giving way to his imagination, thinks that this railway may be the highway of holiness over which the ransomed of the Lord are to return "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." [37] This pious trifling prepares one for still further exhibitions of folly, such as the suggestion that "a rebuilt Palestine, and not a murdered archduke, is the real cause of the present great war." It is too early to say what the war will bring forth, but no forced migration to the Holy Land will answer the terms of ancient prophecy which require the Christianization of the Jews. Our conclusion is, therefore, that the current interest of the Jews in Palestine is no necessary mark of the end of the age or the return of Christ to judge the world.[38]

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[37] Isaiah 35. 10.

[38] In connection with this subject it is well to keep in mind that the Jews themselves are far from agreement on the project of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. The orthodox Jews expect some day to return to the land of their fathers, but they are waiting for the Messiah to lead them back. As was predicted by our Lord, many false Messiahs have appeared from time to time offering to do this. In every instance they have failed. Some pious Jews think that the movement is a wicked attempt to forestall Divine Providence. Reformed Jews are in large numbers opposed to the enterprise. It is significant that of the thousands of Zionist societies in the world the great majority are

The Final Apostasy

This war occurs at a time when lawlessness is rife in the earth, the war itself being the most terrible outbreak of disorder known to modern times; a period also when religious thought is unsettled, when even Christians are astray in both belief and behavior; when it is claimed the church is in an apostasy, and when, therefore, we may look for the speedy exposure of "the mystery of iniquity" and the appearance of "the lawless one," "the son of perdition," in whom all iniquity is to come to a head, and who is to be slain at the appearing of Christ to judge the world, as foretold by the apostle Paul.[39]

Those who claim that this prophecy is in process of fulfillment and is fast approaching the hour of its consummation point to the various forms of lawlessness which they discover in the world. They include in this cata-

found in Russia, indicating that persecutions are largely responsible for the wish of Jews to reach a place of security in their ancestral home. In America and England, where Jews do not suffer persecution, the Zionist movement does not enjoy so large a support. Nathan Straus has said that when Palestine is declared a republic every Jew in the United States who wishes to go there will be given free passage; but the Jew in this country, with his wonderful instinct for money-making and his marvelous ability to adapt himself to every situation, shows greater fondness for New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and other great centers of American commerce than he does for Jerusalem.

[39] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1–10. See pages 175–179.

logue the anarchy, which showed itself in many countries even before this war; the revolutionary socialism, which affects even democracies like England and America; the outrages committed by industrial agitations; the frequency of lynchings in the United States and the multiplication of divorces; the general disregard for authority shown in the disobedience of children in both school and home, and the characteristic American irreverence for dignitaries and rulers, and other flagrant examples of public and private wickedness.

But all these instances of lawlessness may be paralleled in other periods of history. As a single example, we may take the French Revolution, with its denial of God and the immortality of the soul, its defiance of authority and tradition, its breaking up of institutions that were hallowed by antiquity, and its profane assault upon everything sacred in the thought and affections of mankind. Other illustrations of aggravated disorder will be recalled by any studious reader of history, and these will be recognized as fitting Paul's description as well as current conditions.

In addition to the charge that this is a period of extreme lawlessness, the critics of our times who are expecting the gospel dispensation to end in superlative wickedness point to the pres-

ent state of religion in the world as a proof that the prediction of Paul is now approaching fulfillment. In proof of the assertion that "the mystery of iniquity doth already work," they quote Paul's words in passages which we have elsewhere discussed.[40] They declare the time is already come when people "will not endure sound doctrine." [41] They say we are living in the foretold perilous times in which Christians have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.[42] They say we have reached the later times "when some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits," [43] in proof of which they point to Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, Christian Science, and kindred cults. They say that the seven churches of Asia, described in the Apocalypse, represent seven periods in the history of organized Christianity, and declare that the nominal church has now reached the Laodicean state of lukewarmness and the Lord will soon spew the disgusting thing out of his mouth.[44] They say that biblical criticism in our theological seminaries shows them to be nests of heresy, that our religious periodicals

[40] See pp. 168–171.
[41] 2 Timothy 4. 3, 4.
[42] 2 Timothy 3. 1–6.
[43] 1 Timothy 4. 1.
[44] Revelation 3. 16.

are sources of poison, and that our pulpits are occupied by false prophets. They say the church, as a whole, has abandoned the principles of the apostles, is engulfed in lawlessness, and is bearing false witness concerning the gospel of Christ. As one of their writers puts it, "the awful spiritual dearth in the great nominal church is another evidence" of the apostasy preceding the coming of Christ.

The main trouble with this charge is that it is not true. So far as "the mystery of iniquity" is concerned, that explains the chronic condition of the world. John Wesley has a famous sermon,[45] in which he shows that this poison has been spreading itself ever since humanity has been on this globe. Perhaps Paul had a particular variety of iniquity in his mind, but it could not long remain a novelty. As for heresies, they began as soon as the church was started and have kept thriving until this hour. As for hypocrisy, that began in apostolic times and is still in the church and out of it.

But to say that the church is worse in these respects than ever is contrary to the facts. Biblical criticism is inspired by the desire to get at the exact truth of these books in the Bible, and not by a purpose to blast the

[45] Wesley's Sermons, vol. ii, pp. 57–67.

foundations of the faith. Our theological seminaries are earnestly striving to produce the best preachers they can make out of the material sent to them. There never was a time when more study was given to the Scriptures or when more people loved the sacred books than now. There never was a time when Christians were more anxious to get back to the basal truths of religion, or when the gospel of Christ was so well understood, or when so many people were trying to live it. To say there is an awful spiritual dearth in the church is to deny the evidence of great revival movements and spiritual undertakings. The enthusiasm for the salvation of the world never ran so high in the history of Christendom. It is true that our generation does not spend so much time or thought on the cultivation of the individual inner life as did former generations, but much more time and energy are spent on trying to save the unsaved. There may be a slight temporary decline in the appreciation of public and private worship, but there is a great increase in practical religion. In any case, more people are listening to sermons today than at any hour since Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost; and, what is still better, there are more people practicing these sermons than have ever tried to exemplify "pure and

undefiled religion before God and the Father" since the first bureau of charities was organized by Stephen and his board of deacons in Jerusalem.

Another trouble with this charge is that, even if it were sustained, there are parallel instances in history which fit these predictions equally well. A single illustration will suffice. Look at the moral and religious condition of England in the eighteenth century, as described by thoroughly reliable historians.[46]

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[46] "Of the prominent statesmen of the time the greater part were unbelievers in any form of Christianity, and distinguished by the grossness and immorality of their lives. Drunkenness and foul talk were thought no discredit to Walpole. A later prime minister, the Duke of Grafton, was in the habit of appearing with his mistress at the play. Purity and fidelity to the marriage vow were sneered out of fashion; and Lord Chesterfield, in his letters to his son, instructs him in the art of seduction as part of a polite education. At the other end of the social scale lay the masses of the poor. They were ignorant and brutal to a degree which it is hard to conceive, for the vast increase of population which followed on the growth of towns and the development of manufactures had been met by no effort for their religious or educational improvement. Not a new parish had been created. Hardly a single new church had been built. . . . In the streets of London gin shops invited every passerby to get drunk for a penny, or dead drunk for twopence" (Green, A Short History of the English People, p. 707).

It is the testimony of Abel Stevens that "the celebrated jurist Blackstone had the curiosity early in the reign of George III to go from church to church and hear every clergyman of note in London. He assures us that he heard not a single discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero; and that it would have been impossible for him to discover, from what he heard, whether the preacher was a follower of

Surely, this was a time of "awful spiritual dearth," and of frightful apostasy. There were holy persons of that period who believed that the end of all things was at hand. But the more practical, reasonable persons among the spiritually minded leaders of the day saw in the conditions about them a loud summons to renewed diligence; and by the preaching of the truth and the ministry of gentleness to the brutal population of the lower orders stirred England to a religious reformation only second in importance to that of the sixteenth century.

But if it could be shown, as in fact it cannot be, that the falling away in Saint Paul's description of "the mystery of iniquity," which will eventuate in the appearance of the "lawless one," has taken place, it would not follow that the end of the age is immediately at hand, even according to this prediction, for whatever restrains "the son of perdition" must first be taken away. Then "the lawless one" will appear, after which he is to be destroyed. It is not affirmed that all this will follow in quick

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Confucius, of Mohammed, or of Christ." The same author quotes Burnet as saying that he saw "imminent ruin hanging over the church"; and Watts as writing that "religion was dying in the world"; and Butler as declaring that "it had come to be taken for granted that Christianity was no longer a subject of inquiry, but at length was discovered to be fictitious" (Stevens, History of Methodism, vol. i, p. 33; vol. ii, p. 17).

succession. Centuries may be required to fulfill the terms.

Now, let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. It may be true that this war is leading up to the end of the age and to the time when Christ will return to judge the world. But if this be so, it is not proved to be so by the alleged fact that this war shows the world plunged into a bottomless abyss, since it shows nothing of the kind. The chiefs of autocracy and absolutism, the most prominent of whom are nominal Christians, may be, and doubtless are, guilty of a frightful apostasy from the Christian faith which they profess. They have turned the truth of religion into a lie. They have caricatured the God of the Bible. They have stolen the sanctions of religion for acts of the devil. They are guilty of a sacrilege so base that we can only hope they do not realize the enormity of their sin.

But the other Christian nations involved in this war have not shared in this apostasy. On the other hand, they have bravely espoused the cause of righteousness. They have risen to smite the foes of liberty. They are the champions of the doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They are undertaking to drive organized oppression from the face of the earth. They are propos-

ing to make mankind free. They are preparing the way of the Lord. They are making it easier for truth to prevail. This is an upward and not a downward age. When the war is over, the world will have been cleansed from iniquities hoary with age, and the opportunities for Christian evangelization will have been multiplied a hundredfold. All that Christ said to warn his followers against being deceived by tokens and signs which others might falsely interpret should lead us to beware of hasty conclusions, based on our poor human reasonings, about the signs of the times. When people say they know that Christ is soon to return because of the conditions which prevail, and then support their judgment by such alleged fulfillments of prophecy as those which we have considered in this chapter and others of like character, the only response which the judicious can make is, that not one of these things nor all of them together, as stated, are in the least degree convincing to men of sober minds who know the Scriptures and are familiar with the history of mankind.

The supreme thing is, that we live always in the consciousness of Christ's presence and remember that, as in past centuries, periods of extraordinary mental activity, as well as periods of apparent religious depression, have

preceded tremendous upheavals of moral earnestness and spiritual power, so there is much reason to believe that we are now on the eve of the most wonderful development of Christian activity the world has ever known.

The story of an American hero seems appropriate to our day. John Paul Jones, with half his men dead and dying on the deck of his ship, with most of his guns dismantled and his flag shot away from the masthead, is hailed by a British officer with the challenge, "Have you surrendered?" John Paul Jones, climbing the rope ladder with hammer and nails in his hands to put Old Glory back upon the masthead, shouts back in reply, "No, we have just begun the fight." That would seem to be the situation in Christendom to-day. The outlook for the future is so broad and promising that we are constrained to think of these days, not as the last times, but as the first times, not as the end of the age, but in a large sense, the beginning of the age, not as the time when Christ is to return and his church is to confess its failure and defeat, but as a time when Christ's spiritual presence in the earth at this very moment is to be made so vivid and clear to people of spiritual intelligence, that everywhere the church shall wake to the sense of her new responsibility, to the consciousness

of the personal leadership of her Lord, and to the knowledge of her own unexplored and undeveloped resources, and shall eagerly pour out her treasure and her strength for the conquest of the world to Christian truth.

"Lead on, O King Eternal!"

APPENDIX

Millennial Definitions

Millenarians, like the advocates of other doctrines not generally accepted by men, have a vocabulary quite their own. Sometimes they take terms which are already in use and impart to them a significance suited to their own purpose. Frequently these are terms found in the Bible but not used in the sense which millenarians ascribe to them. Sometimes they invent phrases which cannot be understood without explanation, and the explanation given is in the nature of an argument for the doctrine held. Having found that many people are confused by this practice, the author herewith subjoins a brief list of such words and phrases with definitions and expositions which he feels will enable the student to make proper distinctions. Other terms, not so singular, are also included in the list for the convenience of the general reader.

Abomination of Desolation, The.—This phrase is found in Daniel 9. 27; 11. 31; 12. 11; and is quoted by our Lord in his Apocalyptic discourse on Mount Olivet, Matthew 24. 15; Mark 13. 14. In Daniel it refers to the profaning of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and the cessation of the daily sacrifice (see pages 62, 63, 263, 311, 312).

In Christ's address it predicts a sacrilege of like character which, according to history, did occur at the destruction of Jerusalem when the overthrow of the national life and religion of the Jews was accomplished. Nevertheless, premillennialists apply both passages to the coming of the Antichrist at the end of the age, making this event a part of the Tribulation which, according to their program, is to precede the final return of Christ at the beginning of the millennium.

Armageddon, or Har-Magedon.—Found only in Revelation 16. 16, but probably derived from 2 Chronicles 35. 22-24, where the defeat and death of Josiah at Megiddo are described (compare 2 Kings 23. 29, 30). Allusion to this event is made in Zechariah 12. 11. Megiddo was on the edge of the plain of Esdraelon, famous for many a critical battle. Here fought Barak against Sisera (Judges 5. 19-21). Here contended Thotmes III, Rameses II, and Rameses III. Here have struggled the armies of the Assyrians, of the Crusaders, of Napoleon Bonaparte. The region is at this moment (1918) trodden by the feet of British soldiers. John in his Apocalypse sees in this locality the fittest place for the gathering of "the kings of the whole world" to "the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Revelation 16. 14). Armageddon has thus naturally passed into the literature of the world as a symbol of the final contest between good and evil. Reference to this vast overthrow of Satan is also made in Revela-

tion 20. 9. Some see in Revelation 14. 14-20; 19. 11-21 other pictures of the same decisive and final conflict.

Premillennialists are not satisfied to regard Armageddon as symbolical of the ultimate defeat of unrighteousness, much as Waterloo is in modern speech commonly used to symbolize any tragic overthrow, but insist on giving it a literal interpretation forecasting a martial contest in which Christ and his hosts will defeat Satan and his armies. They profess to find descriptions of this fight in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Zechariah. They also link it with 2 Thessalonians 1. 5-10. They expect literal fire to come down out of heaven and devour the enemies of Christ (Revelation 20. 9). It seems more consistent with the character of the Christ who rebuked James and John for desiring to call down fire upon the Samaritans to say that the fire which will drop from heaven will be like that which fell on the Day of Pentecost when three thousand souls were converted. The last war on earth will be a spiritual conflict in which iniquity will be consumed by the fire of love and not by that of hate. A premillennial writer has said, "The present war might merge into the battle of Armageddon, but is more probably the precursor of it." His restraint is commendable, but every war is a precursor of the Armageddon, in which all war will be forever destroyed.

CHILIAD, CHILIASM, CHILIAST.—From the Greek

word meaning "a thousand." The equivalents are millennium, millennialism, millennialist, millenarian, etc., which are derived from a Latin word also meaning "a thousand."

Church, The.—In millennial parlance not organized Christianity, including all its divisions, as ordinarily understood, but a body of persons called out of organized Christianity and separated unto God, known as the saints, the elect, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ; few in numbers and destined to continuous persecution until Christ returns. What is usually called the church is to premillennialists a mere aggregation of churches which in themselves are but assemblies of professing Christians who have the form of godliness, but in most cases deny the power thereof.

Dispensation.—The original meaning of the term as used in the New Testament is "stewardship" and it is so translated in Luke 16. 2, 3, 4; 1 Corinthians 9. 17. It primarily signifies the management of a house. From its Greek form is directly derived our English word "economy." It is translated "dispensation" in Ephesians 1. 10; 3. 2; Colossians 1. 25. It is customary to speak of the Old Testament and the New Testament dispensations, thus broadly expressing the distinction between the Hebrew and Christian administrations of the divine economy. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1. 17). How-

ever, theologians have usually designated three dispensations, the Patriarchal, extending from Adam to the giving of the law; the Mosaic, from the revelation at Sinai to the ministry of Christ; the Christian, from the establishment of the church to the end of the world.

Millennialists, however, have increased the number of dispensations to suit their theories. Many assert there are seven. A prominent premillennialist states them thus. 1. Man innocent —in Eden. 2. Man under conscience—from Eden to the Flood. 3. Man in authority over the earth —from the Flood to Abraham. 4. Man under promise—from Abraham to Moses. 5. Man under law—from Moses to Christ. 6. Man under grace —from the death of Christ to his second advent. 7. Man under the personal reign of Christ—the millennium. The number seven is evidently chosen because of its sacredness in the Scriptures. Aside from this, an ingenious mind might well increase the number of dispensations at will. The scheme is mechanical and arbitrary. It was invented to fit an artificial doctrine. It has no authority in Scripture, though it is called by its author an example of "rightly dividing the word of truth."

Dispensational Truth.—A phrase of premillennialists to express an assumed superiority of wisdom touching the divine economy as exemplified in the several dispensations which their ingenuity has devised. "Those who are familiar

with dispensational truth" is a formula which, with its equivalents, is often used to describe the class of persons who are alleged to have a deeper knowledge of God's words and works than ordinary Christians possess.

Gog and Magog.—Found in the New Testament only in Revelation 20. 8, evidently brought thence from Ezekiel 38 and 39. Gog is called "the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal" in Ezekiel 38. 2, and "of the land of Magog." But in Revelation 20. 8 Gog and Magog are both used to represent "the nations which are in the four corners of the earth."

Most scholars identify Gog as the Lydian monarch Gyges, and Magog as a dynasty existent in Ezekiel's time in the region of the Black and Caspian Seas; but the prophet apparently conceives of Gog not as an historical character, but as an impersonation of the peril which threatens Palestine through an invasion by northern barbarians. This he uses as a type of this world's enmity toward the kingdom of God. The massing of the forces of evil will, according to his expectation, result in the triumph of Jehovah. In like manner Gog and Magog in the book of Revelation designate the unholy world-powers which are to be overthrown by Christ and his saints.

But premillennialists, with their obsession for the literal fulfillment of every prediction, make Ezekiel and John foretell events which are yet to occur. They say that Ezekiel's Gog and Magog

represent the great conflict which will take place at the beginning of the millennium, while John's reference is to the final contest after the millennium. As we are now in the period before the millennium, they see in current events an approach to that conflict which is to take place at Christ's return to judge the nations at the opening of the millennium. For example, they hold that Rosh is Russia, Meshech is Moscow, Tubal is Tobolsk, etc. The prince of Rosh is the ruler of Russia, a country now in revolution and groaning for democracy, which they say it may obtain in some temporary form, though it will later return to monarchy. This great northern power, which will be in alliance with nations not in the original Roman empire, which is to be revived, will descend upon Palestine, where the Jews will then have gathered, and a terrific struggle will ensue just before the reign of peace and righteousness known as the millennium. A thousand years will then pass away, and again Gog and Magog will be assembled for the final engagement, in which the devil and his armies will be everlastingly annihilated, as described in Revelation 20. 8. This program will doubtless be changed by premillennialists if events do not confirm it, and another scheme will be substituted which will seem more plausible. Thus does a straining after literalism destroy the true spirit of prophecy.

Kingdom of God, The.—In millennial usage not the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah referred

to in the Gospels and illustrated by many parables, which was heralded by John the Baptist as at hand, and proclaimed by Christ to be among or within his generation; which Paul and the other apostles recognized as already extending itself through the world in their day, and which is to be consummated in the heavenly and eternal state of the redeemed; but a physical kingdom which can come only with the return of Christ, at which time he and his saints will occupy material thrones and rule the world, having destroyed their enemies by martial operations—a kind of glorified British empire on which the sun never sets. Righteousness and peace will universally characterize this kingdom, but they will have been produced by the extermination of sinners and the enthronement of saints rather than by any distinctly spiritual process.

MILLENNIALISTS, MILLENARIANS.—Those who believe in a reign of righteousness and peace on this earth for a thousand years or more, separated from the rest of human history by definite boundaries and called the millennium. This doctrine rests on three things: 1. A single passage of Scripture, Revelation 20. 1-7. 2. Expressions in the Talmud and in the apocalyptic writings of the Jews in the period between the close of inspired prophecy and the birth of Christ, which describe a golden age of a thousand years. 3. A misapplication of the prophecies which anticipate the triumph of righteousness in the earth, but

nowhere contain any reference to an isolated period of a thousand years known as the millennium.

PREMILLENNIALISTS.—Those who believe Christ will return to the earth before the millennium and by his visible presence and power create that millennium. This is the simplest form of their doctrine, but other teachings in great variety attach themselves to the beliefs of most premillennialists, and these have been discussed in pages 237-65, 273-301, 309-42.

POSTMILLENNIALISTS.—Those who believe Christ will return to the earth after the millennium, or at its climax, or in consequence of it. They look for a steady growth in righteousness under the spiritual lordship of Christ until the world has been largely or wholly won to the truth, when Christ will return to receive the fruits of victory and apportion rewards to the faithful and recompense to the unjust.

ANTIMILLENNIALISTS.—Those who believe that Christ will return to the earth in due time to judge the quick and the dead and to usher in his eternal reign, but who do not believe in a millennium of a thousand years or more either before or after Christ's return. They regard the golden age to come, toward which the prophets looked with eager eyes, as a finality or consummation only to be realized in the heavenly state. Time will melt into eternity when Christ shall have

been acclaimed universal Lord. The church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, during which nearly all the greatest writers of early Christianity lived, were antimillennialists. The term may be properly used to include the majority of Christians in our day who are opposed to premillennialism, among whom are many usually designated as postmillennialists. The rejection of the millennium as a segregated period of time does away with much of the elements of discord between premillennialists and postmillennialists, and does not impair a belief in Christ's second advent.

Parousia.—A Greek word meaning "presence," and so translated in 2 Corinthians 10. 10; Philippians 1. 26; 2. 12; rendered also "coming" in the sense of arrival in 1 Corinthians 16. 17; 2 Corinthians 7. 6, 7; 2 Thessalonians 2. 9; 2 Peter 3. 12; used to denote the future advent of Christ in Matthew 24. 3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15. 23; 1 Thessalonians 2. 19; 3. 13; 4. 15; 5. 23; 2 Thessalonians 2. 1, 8; James 5. 7, 8; 2 Peter 1. 16; 3. 4; 1 John 2. 28.

Prophecy.—In the writings of the premillennialists almost always means "prediction," though prophecy in biblical usage includes preaching, teaching, exhortation, and every form of human utterance, including psalms and hymns, through which God chooses to express himself to mankind. When Paul says, "Despise not prophesyings" (1 Thessalonians 5. 20), a text much

quoted by premillennialists, he is not directing the attention of his readers to predictions, but to the operations of the Holy Spirit on human minds enabling them to speak with unusual power. John Calvin, whose doctrine of election is dear to premillennialists, says, "By the term 'prophesying' I do not understand the gift of foretelling the future, but the science of interpreting Scripture, so that a prophet is an interpreter of the will of God." A noted premillennialist refers to a certain man as "an accredited student of prophecy," by which he means that he is accepted by premillennialists as a safe instructor of the literal interpretation of their favorite predictions. A casual reader is likely to be misled by such a statement into supposing there is a general agreement among devout scholars that men of this class are reliable because they have the indorsement of premillennialists.

Rapture, The.—Not an ecstasy of the saints, but their sudden removal from the earth as the first act in the process of Christ's second advent as arranged by premillennialists. It is held by them that this quick withdrawal will be accomplished secretly. Theoretically it might occur at any instant. Premillennialists indulge in much speculation as to the probable effect of this unobserved departure of the living saints together with those who have been raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18. Compare 1 Corinthians 15. 23; 51-53). The placing of the

Rapture before the actual visible return of Christ to judge the world is a point on which the majority of Christians disagree with premillennialists.

Revelation, The.—Not the Scriptures, nor any part of them; not prophecy nor apocalypse, but the manifestation of Christ at his second advent when he will destroy the Antichrist, according to premillennialists. Our English word "epiphany" is derived from the Greek word translated "manifestation" in 2 Thessalonians 2. 8. The saints who have been caught up in the air to meet their Lord will return with him, and the discomfiture of "the man of sin," "the son of perdition," will be public. Premillennialists quote Revelation 1. 7 in this connection. Between the Rapture and "The Revelation" they place the great Tribulation (see below).

Tribulation, The Great.—According to premillennialists, not human life with its inevitable testing of character, nor any supreme trial of the individual, but a definite period of unparalleled suffering for the whole world in a certain period of its history, fitted in between the coming of Christ to take the saints with him into the air and his return to destroy the Antichrist and set up the millennium. This will be a time, the length of which is in dispute, during which the Antichrist will rule and cruelly persecute and destroy all who do not acknowledge his sovereignty. It will end with the return of Christ to judge the

nations. The basic passage for this doctrine is Revelation 7. 14, but premillennialists illustrate and defend their theory by reference to Daniel 12. 1, Jeremiah 30. 7, Matthew 24. 21, 22, and virtually every prediction of extensive disaster found in the Bible. This bringing together unrelated passages which plainly refer to separate historic events and focusing them upon one event at the end of the age is a favorite method of premillennialists which discredits either their intelligence or their honesty. The passages just referred to are described and applied in pages 310-315.

Tribulation Saints.—Those who refuse obeisance to the Antichrist during the great Tribulation and are murdered for their loyalty to Christ. According to premillennialists they will be raised from the dead when Christ returns to earth with his saints at the close of the Rapture (see above). Thus we have, according to premillennialists, a resurrection of the saints at the time of the Rapture, a resurrection of the "tribulation saints" after the Rapture and at the time of the Revelation (see above), and the resurrection of others who are still in their graves at the end of the millennium and all of those who died in the period called "a little season" during which Satan has been loosed, and after which he is overthrown forever. This multiplicity of resurrections is utterly foreign to anything Jesus taught. See John 5. 28, 29; 6. 39, 40, 44.

INDEX OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS

GENESIS
3. 9..... 133
18. 25..... 83
49. 14..... 274
EXODUS
7. 1..... 268
NUMBERS
11. 24-29..... 268
24. 17..... 274
DEUTERONOMY
18. 18-22..... 269
29. 29..... 16
33. 2..... 274
JOSHUA
10. 8-14..... 284
JUDGES
5. 19-21..... 344
7. 15-22..... 284
1ST SAMUEL
14. 19-23..... 284
1ST KINGS
22. 19-23..... 281
2D KINGS
23. 29, 30..... 344
1ST CHRONICLES
25. 1..... 268
2D CHRONICLES
15. 8..... 268
20. 15-23..... 284
35. 22-24..... 344
JOB
19. 25..... 274
PSALMS
2. 8..... 276
8. 6-9..... 319
9. 8..... 83
72. 11..... 276
72. 16..... 279
86. 9..... 276
90. 4..... 109
102. 16..... 274
PROVERBS
30. 1..... 268
ISAIAH
2. 2.....279, 283
2. 2-5..... 288
2. 12..... 304
6. 11-13..... 272
9. 6..... 266
9. 7..... 276
11. 1-9.....205, 288
13. 6. 9, 13..... 304
13. 6-22..... 307
13. 10.....70, 71, 306
13. 16-21..... 280
24 and 27..... 281
34. 4.....70, 71, 306
34. 8..... 304
35. 10..... 331
35. 55, 60.....205, 288
38. 5..... 272
38. 33-35..... 272
40. 9-11.....266-274
42. 1-4, 6, 7..... 267

ISAIAH
45. 22, 23..... 267
48. 3-7..... 269
52. 7-12.....266, 274
60 267
61. 2..... 304
JEREMIAH
1. 9..... 268
18. 7-10..... 271
20. 9..... 268
22. 18, 19..... 272
23. 28..... 11
25. 11, 12..... 272
26. 12, 13, 17-19..... 271
28. 272
30. 7...304, 306, 310, 355
30. 10, 11..... 325
38. 14-23..... 272
46. 10..... 304
LAMENTATIONS
2. 22..... 304
EZEKIEL
1 to 32..... 281
33 to 48..... 281
2. 3..... 268
3. 27..... 268
7. 19..... 304
13. 5..... 304
30. 3..... 304
32. 7, 8.....70, 71, 306
37. 9..... 268
38. 2..... 348
47 279
47. 1-12..... 283
DANIEL
2. 31-45..... 281
7. 281
7. 13, 14..... 206
DANIEL
7. 21-27..... 306
7. 25..... 303
8. 281
9. 24-28..... 281
9. 27..... 343
11. 2-12. 4..... 281
11. 31..... 343
12. 1.....262, 311, 355
12. 4..... 318
12. 7..... 303
12. 11..... 343
HOSEA
4. 1-6..... 305
JOEL
1. 15.....304, 306
2. 1, 2, 11, 31..... 304
2. 3-11..... 306
2. 28-32.....70, 71
2. 30, 31..... 306
2. 31..... 306
3. 9-21..... 281
3. 14..... 304
3. 18.....279, 284
AMOS
2. 1-3..... 305
3. 9-15..... 305
5. 2..... 272
5 to 7..... 306
5. 18-20.....304, 305
7. 14, 15..... 268
9. 11, 12..... 328
9. 13....70, 71, 279, 306
9. 13-15..... 279
OBADIAH
15. 304
17-21 308

JONAH
3 271

MICAH
3. 12..... 272
4. 1..... 283
4. 10..... 272

HABAKKUK
3. 308

ZEPHANIAH
1. 7, 14..... 304
1. 14-16..... 306
1. 15-18..... 310
2. 2, 3..... 304
2. 11..... 267
2. 14..... 280
3. 1-13..... 305

HAGGAI
2. 6, 7..... 267
2. 22..... 306

ZECHARIAH
1 to 8..... 306
9. 9, 10..... 266
12. 11..... 344
14. .....281, 282
14. 1..... 304
14. 1-4..... 282
14. 4, 5, 10, 16..... 284
14. 8, 9..... 283
14. 9..... 276
14. 10..... 283
14. 12, 13..... 283
14. 16..... 284
14. 18..... 284
14. 20..... 284

MALACHI
3. 2..... 304

MALACHI
3. 2-15..... 306
4. 5..... 304

MATTHEW
2. 2..... 79
7. 15..... 18
7. 24-29..... 58
8. 10..... 106
10. 1-23..... 99
10. 23.....36, 100
13. 24-30.....86, 185
13. 31..... 189
13. 31-33..... 116
13. 33..... 186
13. 36-43.....37, 86
16. 27.....36, 78
16. 28.....93, 113
18. 20..... 145
19. 28..... 78
20. 28.....134, 191
22. 44..... 122
24 .....39, 51, 281
24. 3..... 352
24. 4-8..... 60
24. 4-13..... 61
24. 4, 23..... 138
24. 5, 11, 24..... 17
24. 6..... 60
24. 6-8..... 303
24. 8..... 60
24. 13..... 99
24. 14.....67, 102, 116
24. 15.....263, 343
24. 15-28..... 62
24. 17, 23, 28, 37, 41. 56
24. 21, 22...261, 311, 355
24. 22..... 65
24. 25-28..... 78

MATTHEW
24. 27.....68, 244, 352
24. 29.....66, 250, 262
24. 29-31..... 69
24. 30.....78, 95
24. 31.....72, 81
24. 32, 33.....39, 139
24. 34.....65, 113
24. 35..... 73
24. 36.....68, 105, 137
24. 36-42..... 318
24. 37..... 352
24. 39..... 352
24. 37-39.....69, 182
24. 39, 44..... 67
24. 40, 41..... 181
24. 42-44..... 142
24. 43..... 79
24. 43-51..... 56
24. 44.....108, 138
24. 45-47..... 151
24. 48..... 101
24. 48-51..... 152
25. 1-12..... 39
25. 1-13..... 147
25. 5..... 101
25. 13-20..... 39
25. 14-30.....81, 152
25. 19..... 101
25. 31..... 78
25. 31-33..... 82
25. 31-46.....
37, 58, 87, 183, 252
25. 34..... 164
25. 40, 45..... 83
25. 42-44..... 39
26. 13..... 116
26. 40..... 156
MATTHEW
26. 64.....37, 78
28. 18-20.....129, 275
28. 20..... 145
MARK
4. 26-29..... 116
6. 6..... 106
8. 38.....37, 85
9. 1.....36, 113
9. 42..... 19
10. 45..... 191
12. 7, 8..... 303
13. .....39, 51, 281
13. 3..... 52
13. 5-8..... 60, 61
13. 6, 22..... 17
13. 7..... 60
13. 8..... 60
13. 10..... 116
13. 13..... 99
13. 14.....263, 343
13. 14-23..... 63
13. 19, 20..... 311
13. 21-23..... 78
13. 24.....66, 261, 262
13. 24, 25..... 250
13. 24-27..... 69
13. 26..... 78
13. 27.....72, 81
13, 29..... 139
13. 30..... 65
13. 32.....68, 105
13. 32-37..... 318
13. 33..... 148
13. 34-37..... 150
13. 37..... 138
14. 10..... 67
14. 62.....37, 78

LUKE
2. 52..... 105
9. 26.....37, 85
9. 27.....36, 113
9. 55..... 118
10. 18..... 230
12. 1..... 187
12. 35, 36..... 109
12. 35-38..... 147
12. 35-48..... 39
12. 39-46..... 56
13. 20, 21..... 186
16. 2, 3, 4..... 346
17. 2..... 19
17. 20..... 287
17. 20-37.. .....38, 56
17. 21..... 287
17. 26, 27..... 69
17. 26-30..... 182
18. 1-8..... 190
18. 7, 8..... 38
19. 10.....119, 134
19. 11-28..... 39
21. .....39, 51, 281
21. 8..... 17
21. 8-11 60
21. 8-19..... 61
21. 9..... 60
21. 20-24.....63, 64, 262
21. 22-24..... 261
21. 24...68, 116, 172, 324
21. 25-28..... 69
21. 27..... 78
21. 28.....259
21. 32..... 65
21. 34-36.....39, 148, 318
21. 36.....68, 264
24. 9-11..... 303
LUKE
24. 49..... 120
24. 50, 51..... 119
24. 52, 53..... 120
JOHN
1. 1..... 107
1. 17..... 346
1. 51..... 42
3. 16..... 165
5. 24..... 89
5. 25.....90, 233
5. 25-29..... 43
5. 26..... 90
5. 27..... 90
5. 28, 29....91, 140, 355
5. 39..... 13
6. 39, 40, 44....254, 355
7. 17..... 14
8. 32..... 8
9. 4..... 157
10. 28, 29..... 231
11. 25, 26.....43, 89
12. 32..... 191
13. 23..... 40
14. 2, 3.....42, 128
14. 3..... 91
14. 18..... 131
14. 18-20..... 92
14. 28..... 42
16. 12-14..... 49
16. 13-15..... 92
17. 11..... 164
17. 24.....164, 232
18. 36..... 287
19. 26..... 40
20. 2..... 40
20. 31.....36, 88
21. 7, 20..... 40

JOHN
21. 22.....41, 42
ACTS
1. 7.....16, 112
1. 8..... 120
1. 9..... 120
1. 10, 11..... 119
1. 11..... 80
2. 5..... 103
2. 7-21..... 71
2. 9, 11..... 103
2. 33..... 123
2. 44, 45..... 26
3. 19-21..... 109
4. 32-35..... 26
7. 56..... 121
10. 42..... 84
15. 12-17..... 328
15. 13-18..... 174
17. 30, 31..... 84
ROMANS
2. 5, 16..... 43
2. 16..... 84
5. 18..... 191
8. 9..... 13
8. 23..... 259
11. 15..... 329
11. 25-27.....172, 326
12. 5..... 291
12. 16..... 18
14. 10-12..... 83
1ST CORINTHIANS
1. 4-8..... 43
1. 8.....85, 308
1. 21, 25..... 9
2. 13..... 10
4. 5..... 84
5. 5..... 308
1ST CORINTHIANS
5. 7..... 187
7. 25..... 10
9. 17..... 346
10. 17..... 291
11. 26.....24, 43
12. 12..... 291
14. 6..... 280
15. 17-19..... 33
15. 23.....43, 95, 352
15. 23.....246, 253
15. 35, 44..... 246
15. 24-26..... 96
15. 51, 52..... 244
15. 51-53..... 353
15. 51-54..... 94
15. 52..... 254
15. 57, 58..... 97
16. 17..... 352
16. 22..... 43
2D CORINTHIANS
1. 14.....43, 308
4. 2..... 9
5. 10..... 83
7. 6, 7..... 352
10. 10..... 352
GALATIANS
6. 3..... 18
EPHESIANS
1. 10..... 346
1. 23..... 291
3. 2..... 346
4. 12..... 291
4. 30..... 43
5. 23-27..... 291
6. 17..... 20
PHILIPPIANS
1. 6, 10..... 308

PHILIPPIANS
1. 6-10..... 43
1. 10..... 85
1. 26..... 352
2. 12..... 352
2. 4-11..... 81
2. 7..... 105
2. 16.....43, 85, 308
3. 11.....43, 93
3. 20, 21.....43, 94
4. 5..... 43
COLOSSIANS
1. 18..... 291
1. 23..... 102
1. 25..... 346
2. 8..... 8
2. 9.....50, 107
2. 19..... 291
3. 4..... 43
3. 4, 5..... 29
3. 15..... 291
1ST THESSALONIANS
1. 10.....43, 85
2. 1-3..... 108
2. 19.....43, 352
3. 13.....43, 85, 352
4. 7..... 258
4. 13-18..43, 95, 245, 353
4. 15..... 352
4. 16..... 80
5. 1-10..... 43
5. 2.....79, 308
5. 3..... 314
5. 20..... 252
5. 23.....43, 85, 352
2D THESSALONIANS
1. 5-10..... 345
1. 7-10.....43, 86
2D THESSALONIANS
2. 1..... 45
2. 1-3..... 108
2. 1, 8..... 352
2. 1-8..... 43
2. 9..... 352
2. 1-10.....281, 332
2. 1-12..... 176
2. 2..... 308
2. 2, 5..... 176
2. 7.....261, 264
2. 8.....260, 354
2. 9..... 252
3. 10-13..... 153
1ST TIMOTHY
2. 9..... 9
2. 14..... 20
2. 15..... 11
3. 1-5..... 170
3. 1-6..... 334
3. 13..... 170
4. 1.....43, 84, 334
4. 3. 4..... 22
4. 6-8..... 82
4. 8..... 43
2D TIMOTHY
3. 1-6..... 334
4. 3, 4..... 334
TITUS
2. 11-14..... 23
2. 11-15..... 43
HEBREWS
1. 3..... 123
2. 9, 10..... 191
3. 22..... 123
4. 14-16..... 125
7. 25..... 125
9. 24-28..... 44

HEBREWS
9. 28..... 24
10. 22-24..... 44
10. 25.....44, 148
10. 35-37..... 44
10. 37..... 109

JAMES
5. 7, 8.....44, 146, 352
5. 9..... 139

1ST PETER
1. 3..... 149
1. 7, 13..... 44
1. 8, 9..... 148
1. 13..... 149
1. 24, 25..... 9
3. 22..... 123
4. 13.....44, 149
5. 1-4.....44, 151

2D PETER
1. 16.....8, 352
1. 20, 21..... 10
2. 1..... 17
3 44
3. 3, 4..... 167
3. 4.....28, 352
3. 8.....109, 207, 225
3. 10.....79, 308
3. 10-13..... 71
3. 12..... 352
3. 16..... 10
3. 17, 18..... 22

1ST JOHN
2. 1, 2..... 126
2. 2..... 164
2. 15, 16..... 165
2. 18.....61, 162
2. 28.....44, 85, 352

1ST JOHN
3. 2, 3.....44, 87, 235
3. 8..... 230
4. 1..... 17
4. 1, 2, 3..... 62
5. 4, 5..... 165
5. 19..... 163

2D JOHN
7 44

JUDE
14, 15.....44, 87

REVELATION
1. 1..... 221
1. 3..... 221
1. 7..44, 79, 95, 248, 354
1. 11..... 268
1. 7, 14..... 355
1. 18..... 132
2. 7, 10, 17, 26, 28.. 217
2. 25.....44, 149
3. 2, 3..... 149
3. 3..... 79
3. 3, 10, 11..... 44
3. 5, 12, 21..... 217
3. 11.....109, 149
3. 16..... 334
3. 21..... 123
7. 14..... 311
11. 2, 3..... 303
12. 6, 14..... 303
13. 5..... 303
14. 14-16.....44, 87
14. 14-20..... 345
16. 14..... 344
16. 15.....44, 79, 149
16. 16.....303, 316, 344
19. 11-21....222, 224, 345
20. 1-10.....204, 213

REVELATION

20. 5..... 233
20. 6..... 234
20. 8.....249, 348
20. 9..... 345
20. 11..... 71
20. 12-15..... 87
20. 13-15..... 253
21. 1.....71, 284
21. 2..... 236
22. 5..... 284
22. 19..... 243
22. 20..... 44

INDEX OF TOPICS

Abomination of Desolation, 62, 63, 263, 312, 313, 343, 344
Advance, Signs of, 194–203, 335–337, 340–342
Advent, Second. See Second Coming.
Age, End of the, 67–72, 241, 302–342
Allegorical or Figurative Passages, how interpreted, 69–72, 218–220, 277–287
Antichrist, The, 162, 175-181, 239–241, 259, 260
Antimillennialism, 227, 228, 351, 352
Apocalypse, Meaning of, 51 footnote
Apocalypse, The, of Saint John, 149, 150, 215–222
  See Revelation, Book of
Apocalyptical Discourse of Jesus, 50–76, 98, 99–101
  Practical Aim of, 54–56
  Compared with Revelation, 221
Apocalyptic Writing, Character of, 280, 281
Apostasy, Final, 175–179, 238–240, 332–340
Apostles' Creed and Second Advent, 24
Armageddon, 241, 303, 344, 345
Ascension of Jesus, Prediction at, 119
Bible, Right Use of, 8–12, 255
  Misuse of, 10, 11, 16, 17, 259, 264, 265, 273, 274, 315–322
  and Facts of Experience, 8, 159–161
  Mysteries of, 15–17
  Latest Writings in, 161, 162

Body of Christ, Mystical, 239, 240, 291–293
Burial Service and Second Advent, 25

Chiliad, Chiliasm, Chiliast, 345
Christ, Test of Doctrine, 12–15, 50, 115–117
  On Manner of Second Advent, 77–81
  On Purpose of Second Advent, 81–97
  On Time of Second Advent, 105–107
  In Heaven, 121–129

Reigning in Glory, 122–124
Interceding Above, 125–127
Preparing for Saints, 127–129
In the World, 130–135
Expectations of, 182–191
Christians, Early, and Second Advent, 25–27, 120, 121, 192, 193
Modern, and Second Advent, 193, 194
Church, Better than in other days, 197–200
In Premillennial Sense, 346
See Body of Christ.
Confessions of Faith and Second Advent, 25

Daniel, Book of, 110, 263, 285, 312–313
Beasts in, 15
Day of the Lord, 205, 304–309
Day of Christ, 308, 309
Death and Second Coming, 136–140
First and Second, 233, 234
Dispensation, 346, 347
Dispensational Truth, 347, 348
Doctrine, Test of, 12–15

Elect, Number of, 172–174, 180, 181, 290, 291

Facts, to be faced, 8
Faith, on the Earth at Second Advent, 190, 191

Gentiles, Times of, 324–329
Gog and Magog, 348, 349
Gospel, to be Preached Everywhere, 102

Heaven on Earth, 236

Interpretation, Principles of, 52–59, 218–220
Israel, Restoration of, 239, 240, 322–331

Jerusalem, Destruction of, 52–54, 59, 62–67, 312, 313, 324, 325
Christ's Capital, 240
And the End of the Age, 72–76
Jews. See Israel.
John, Gospel of, on Second Coming, 39–42, 87–95, 114, 115
Lateness of, 40, 41
Judgment, Final, Parable of, 183, 252, 253
Judgments, How Many? 251, 252

Kingdom of God, Parables of, 184–190
In Prophecy, 266, 267
Material, 286–290, 349, 350
Spiritual, 286, 287

Knowledge, Increase of and the End of the Age, 318–321

Last Day, The, 254
Last Hours, Days, Times, 162, 163, 341, 342
Last Things, 51 footnote
Last Trump, When? 254
Lawless One, The. See Man of Sin
Leaven, Parable of, 186–189
Literal Interpretation, 243, 277–285

Man of Sin, 175–181, 332, 338
Millennial Fancies and Fallacies, 236–265
Millennium, The Origin of Doctrine, 204–206
  Prophecy and, 205
  Computations of, 207
  Varying Influence of, 208–210
  Premillennial and Postmillennial, 210–212
  Built on one Passage, 204–212, 214
  Scriptural Basis of, 212–216, 350, 351
  Abortive, 248, 249
  Not in Old Testament, 227, 228, 266, 267
Missions, Progress of, 200
Mortals and Immortals, 247
Mustard Seed, Parable of, 189, 190
Mystery of Iniquity. See Man of Sin

Nature, Dissolution of, 69–71, 240, 241, 250, 251
Noah and Lot, 68, 69, 182, 183

Parousia, 352
Paul, Optimist, 174, 175
  On Events at Second Advent, 80, 84, 244, 245
Peace, Universal, 236, 240, 266, 315–317
Perdition, Son of. See Man of Sin
Postmillennialism, 210, 287, 351
Predestination, 290
Premillennialists, 210–212, 351
  Program of, 238–243
  Differences Among, 237
  Chief Points of, 242
  How Made, 242, 243, 264, 265
  Make a Third Coming, 248
  At Odds with the Bible, 250–256
  And Prophecy, 266–283
  Compared with Postmillennialists, 287
  May be Disappointed, 287–290
  Predestination and, 290

Bitterness of, 293–295
Jewish in Spirit, 295–298
No Effort to Improve the World, 298, 299
Objections to Summarized, 299, 300
Prediction in Prophecy, 268–272
and Proximity, 272
Probation, Mixed, 247, 248
Prophecy, Meaning of, 268–272, 352, 353
Messianic, 272, 273
And Premillennialism, 273–286
Literal Fulfillment of, 276–286
Apocalyptic, 280–286
and Second Advent, 266–286
Not Yet Fulfilled, 276–280
And Premillennialists, 273–286
Prophets, Misleading, 17–19
False, 60, 61

Rapture, The, 239, 246–248, 353
Those Left by, 246, 247
Reason for Doctrine, 260, 261
Resurrection, Physical and Spiritual, 89–95
Of Saints, 239
Resurrections, How Many? 252–255, 353
Retribution and Reward, 85–87
Return, Christ's. See Second Coming
Revelation, Book of, 215–222
Numbers in, 226, 227
Interpretation of, 218–222
Premillennial Reliance in, 212–215
And Christ's Apocalyptic Discourse, 221
Chapter 20 and other Scriptures, 248–257
"Revelation, The," 240, 258, 260, 354

Saints, Reign of, 231, 232
Resurrection of, 233, 234
Satan, Binding of, 225–231
Release of, 234, 242
Overthrow of, 234, 242
Second Coming, Approach to Doctrine of, 7–22
Bible and, 16, 19, 21
True Place of, 23–49
Early Christians and, 25–27, 192, 193
In Apostles' Creed, 25
In Burial Service, 25
In Confessions, 25
Three Attitudes Toward, 28–35, 44
Predictions in the Synoptics, 35–39

In John's Gospel, 39–42, 87–95
Paul and Other Apostles on, 43–45
Relative Importance of, 45–48, 88
Better Knowledge of Today, 48, 49
Christ's Apocalyptic Prophecy of, 50–76
Manner of, 77–80, 119
Purpose of, 81–97
Judgment at, 82–85
Retribution at, 85–87
Resurrection at, 87–89
Climax of, 95–97
Time of Uncertain, 98–117, 120, 137–139
Time Unknown to Jesus, 105, 106
Time of According to Paul, 108
Those Who Reject, 111
Distinguished from Other Events, 113, 114
Spiritual Significance of, 114, 115
At the Climax of History, 115, 117
Modern Christians and, 193, 194
Not in Revelation 19, 223, 224
In Revelation 20. 11–15, 234, 235
Signs of the Times, 302–342
Talents, Parable of, 101, 154–156
Tares, Parable of, 185, 186
Teachers, Troublesome, 20–22
Teachings, False, 17–19
Thessalonians, Mistake of, about Second Coming, 153
Comforted by Paul's Teaching of Second Advent, 244, 245
Travel and End of the Age, 318–322
Tribulation, The, 69, 239, 258–262, 354
Saints, 239, 355
Reason for the Doctrine of, 263, 264, 310–316

Virgins, Parable of, 101, 154

War and Millennial Fallacies, 303, 304, 310–318
War and Christianity, 196, 197, 203, 341, 342
Watchfulness Enjoined, 136–159
Time but one Element of, 141–143
Patience in, 145, 146
In Personal Life, 146–149
In Christian Service, 150–155
In Gethsemane, 155, 156
Wesley, John, and Premillennialism, 197–199

On Mystery of Iniquity, 335, 336
World, the, Christ in Now, 129–135, 143–145
Is it Growing Worse? 158–203, 238, 332–342
Facts About, and the Bible, 159–161
As John Saw It, 163–166
New Testament Meanings of the Word, 164–166
As Seen by Peter, 167, 168
As Seen by Paul, 168–180
To-day and Yesterday, 171–175
Christ's Expectations of, 182–190
Faith in, When Son of Man Comes, 190, 191
Getting Better, 194–203, 341, 342
Dream of Humanity for, 204, 205, 266
To be Redeemed, 301, 302

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